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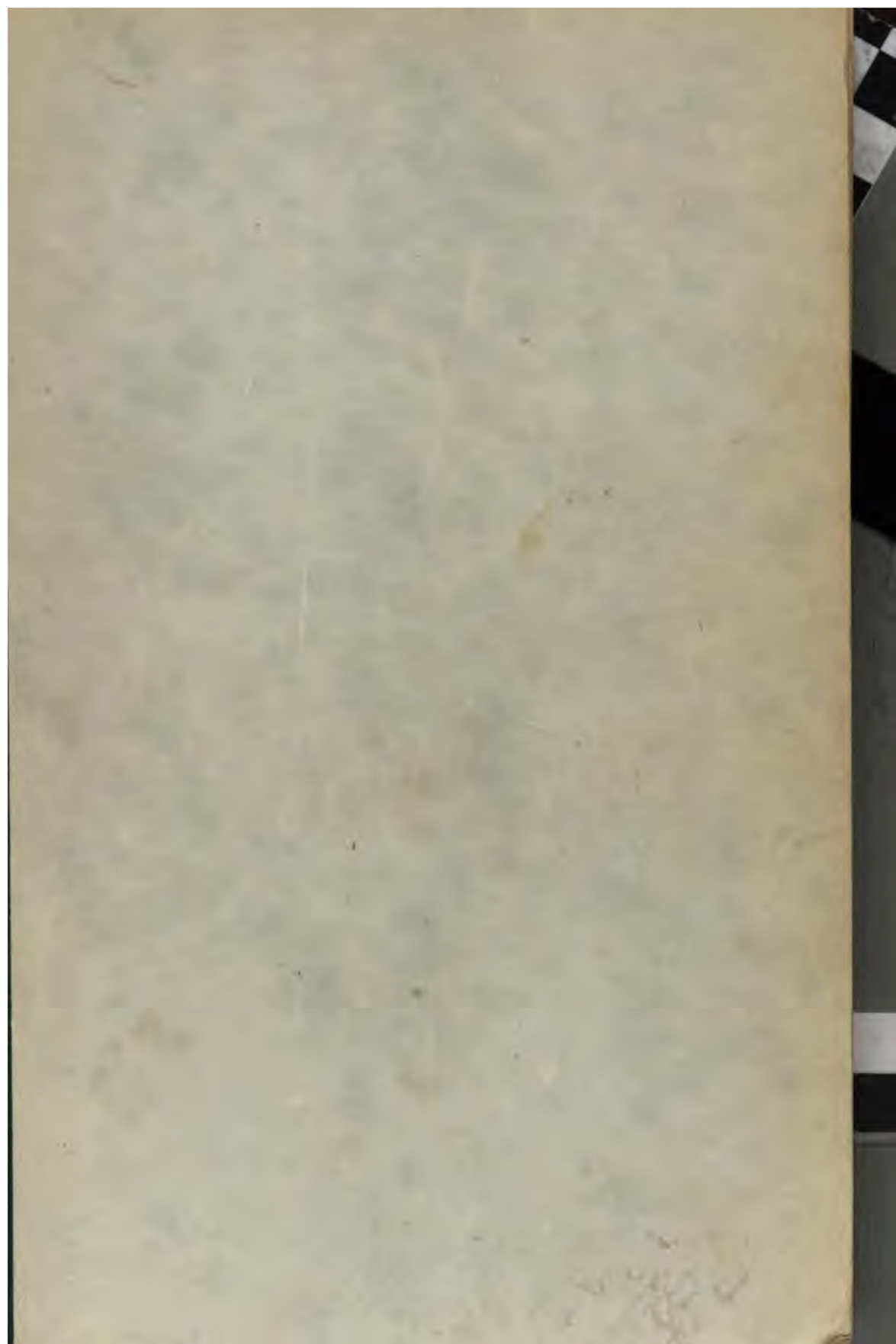
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**The Attitude of the Catholic Church Towards
Witchcraft and the Allied Practices
of Sorcery and Magic**

BY

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OF THE

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A DISSERTATION

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PREFACE

The purpose of this dissertation is to present in concise form and from the Catholic point of view a history of the development of witchcraft and the attitude of the Church with regard to this vexed and curious question during the first seventeen centuries. The treatment of the subject is purely historical, hence all mention of controversy and of controversial discussion has been avoided. All reference to secular legislation has been omitted except in a few instances where the civil code provided for certain privileges to be accorded to the Church and the ecclesiastical tribunals.

The author hopes that this essay will not be a useless one inasmuch as there has not come under her observation any Catholic work in English on this particular aspect of the subject, while of the non-Catholic and anti-Catholic works the number is legion. Many of the monumental productions in English, French and German are written in a spirit of hostile criticism, while the Church documents and original sources which have been largely used in the present work, and which form the other side of the question, are available to few students and readers of history.

The array of references open to research, however, is a formidable one and in a dissertation of limited scope some principle of selection was indispensable. Hence only the opinions and testimony of representative ecclesiastical writers and eminent canonists in each age have been cited. Of the numerous lay writers most were barred because of the nature of the subject which aims at emphasizing the position of the Church, but use has been made of the jurists Tengler, Pegna, and Remigius who wrote from the theological view-point.

It remains for the author to make grateful acknowledgment to Rev. Nicholas A. Weber, S. T. D., Rev. Wil-

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CHAPTER I

DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS

Witchcraft, that dark and tragic practice which has stained so many of the pages of history with unnameable deeds, is as universal and as enduring as the religious instinct itself. The mere mention of the word suffices to start a storm of controversy—was it a reality or merely a delusion? In pre-Christian times it was universally believed, it persisted down through Christian ages, and even in our own day is still held in some form by a large number of persons, yet our attitude towards it is largely one of disbelief. To most persons, one who asserts the existence or even the possibility of witchcraft labors under a burden of proof, which he cannot support without great difficulty. Such a belief is now regarded as monstrous, absurd, abnormal, and the question is usually dismissed in scornful silence and pity for the foolish individual who has the temerity to hint at its reality. Before undertaking a study of the subject, then, we must lay aside our twentieth-century scepticism, our knowledge of science, of medicine, of nature and her laws; we must approach the historical survey of our subject in the credulous, uncritical attitude of the period in which the phenomena most frequently occurred, the Middle Ages. I

The statement has been made that many people at the present time are devoted to the witch's cult, if not in name, at least in reality. It is only necessary to read the magazines to discover this truth. Thousands of pages are taken up with expositions of the occult, spiritism, table-rapping, seances, etc., all of which are but different manifestations of the old witchcraft idea, for the underlying principle of all is the same—an irresistible attraction for some power which is not natural. II

and, in return, received from him certain distinctive powers such as those of riding through the air on a broomstick, crossing the sea in a sieve, assuming different shapes at will and having at their disposal an imp or *familiar* willing and able to perform any service that might be needed to carry out their malicious purposes.*

Turning our attention from the practice to the agent herself, the witch, we find that the idea has undergone several changes in meaning. Her attributes vary with the social temperament and religious ideas of her worshipers and persecutors, but medieval Christianity gave her the definite shape in which she is now universally recognized. Our modern interpretation of the word *witch* was unknown in ancient times. The Hebrew used the word מַכְשֵׁף (M^c khash sheph) maleficus, juggler, poisoner, which the Septuagint and Josephus translate φαρμακός, one who mixes drugs, a word used indiscriminately of both sexes. This ancient meaning was also commonly applied to the word by the Romans and used down through the first few centuries of the Christian era. As ages passed, the word witch was applied exclusively to the female sex and in the twelfth century a witch was defined as a "woman in collusion voluntarily or enforced with a demon" by whose power she could work marvels and be transported through the air to the "Sabbat," but as yet there was no question of a formal pact. By this time, also, the witch had grown older, uglier and meaner, and from the fourteenth century the type of recognized witches varies only in detail. Reginald Scott's description, written in 1643, may be taken as the typical one: "Witches be commonly old, lame, bleare-eyed, pale, fowle and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious; in whose drousie minds the devill hath gotten a fine seat. They are lean and deformed, showing melancholie in

*Thurston, Catholic Encyclopedia, XV; art., Witchcraft.

*Nevius, Demon Possession and Allied Themes. New York, 1896. 310.

their faces to the horror of all that see them. They are doting, scolds, mad, devilish."¹⁰ Glanvil, Chaplain in Ordinary to Charles II, writes: "A witch is one who can do or seems to do strange things, beyond the human power of art and ordinary nature, by vertue of a Confederacy with evil Spirits. The Witch occasions, but is not the Principle Efficient, she seems to do it, but the Spirit performs the wonder, sometimes immediately, as in transportations and Possessions, sometimes using the Witch as an Instrument. And these things are done by vertue of a Covenant or Compact between the Witch and an Evil Spirit."¹¹

Careful comparison of facts shows that the question of a formal pact, signed by the witch with her blood, came into existence only in the thirteenth century, but became general during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹² This conception of the attributes of the witch was contributed to by the excesses of the various heretics, Gnostics, Manichaeans, Vaudois, who were so given to superstitious practices that ~~witchcraft came to be regarded by the Church as the worst form of heresy, which furnishes a possible explanation of the rigor with which churchmen persecuted all witches, no matter what their age or condition.~~ This point will be taken up in a subsequent chapter.

An interesting question may occur to the reader, "Why was witchcraft generally limited to women?" "To one wizard, a thousand witches" says an unknown writer of the time of Louis XIII.¹³ The origin of this may be that in the East, where witchcraft was so prevalent, women were considered to be of an inferior order, not only on account of the weakness of their natural faculties, but also because of their natural inclination to wicked-

¹⁰Scott, Discoverie of Witchcraft, London, 1665, 58.

¹¹Glanvil, Sadducismus Triumphatus, London, 1726, 70.

¹²Ency. Theol. XX, 581, Magie.

¹³Michelet, La Sorcière, Brussels and Leipsic, 1863, introd. VII.

ness; therefore they delighted in the magic arts. The early Fathers of the Church answered by assuming the weakness of womankind, their inherent wickedness, the fact that they are always curious to probe the unknown, always prone to fall into evil snares. A modern writer submits the following explanation: "Physically, the natural constitution of women renders their imaginative organs more excitable for the ecstatic conditions of prophetic or necromantic arts. On all occasions of religious or other cerebral excitement, women are generally most easily reduced to the requisite state for the expected supernatural visitations. Their hysterical natures are sufficiently indicative of the origin of such hallucinations."¹⁴

The explanation given by Grimm in his "Deutsche Mythologie" might be applied to womankind in general. He says, "Our earliest antiquity has attributed the art (witchcraft) chiefly to women. The reason for this is to be sought for in all the outward and inward conditions. Women, not men, were entrusted with the selection and concoction of powerful means of healing, just as with the preparation of daily food; preparing salves, weaving linen, binding wounds, their soft, tender hands could do the best; the art of writing and reading letters and words was assigned chiefly to women in the middle ages. The disturbed existence of men was filled with war, hunting, agriculture and manual labor, women had qualifications of experience and comfortable leisure to fit them for occult magic. The imaginative powers are warmer and more susceptible in women than in men, and hence an inward, holy power of sooth-saying has been attributed to them. Women were priestesses and sooth-sayers; somnambulism is still at the present day most common in women. Again, looked at from one point of view, we find that the art of magic belonged especial

¹⁴Williams, Superstitions of Witchcraft. London, 1865, 57.

to old women, who, dead as it were to love and work, gave up their whole time and thoughts to secret arts. Fancy, tradition, knowledge of means of healing, poverty and leisure have made witches out of women.¹⁵

After this exposition of the term witch, it may be useful to a further understanding of the subject, to investigate in detail the chief practice of witchcraft, the Sabbath. This was perhaps the most characteristic of their sorceries and included the greater number of their malpractices. The Sabbath or Sabbat, probably originated in France or Italy, though of this there is no certainty. The first allusion to it occurs in a fragment of canon law, not later than the tenth century, where it is treated as a diabolical delusion. "Some wicked women reverting to Satan and seduced by the illusions and phantasms of demons believe and profess that they ride at night with Diana on certain beasts with an innumerable multitude of women, passing over immense distances. It were well if they alone perished in their infidelity and did not draw so many along with them. For innumerable multitudes, deceived by this false opinion, believe all this to be true, and thus relapse into pagan errors. . . . It is to be taught to all that he who believes such things has lost his faith, and he who has not the true faith, is not of God, but of the devil." This proclamation came to be attributed to the Council of Ancyra, 314, but cannot be identified with its decrees; it is found in the work of Regino of Prüm (d.917), was adopted by canonists and embodied in the collections of Burchard, Ivo and Gratian, being known as the *Canon Episcopi* or *Capitulum Episcopi*.¹⁶ Thus the Church in the tenth century regarded the nocturnal flight as a fiction and denounced belief in it as heretical. Side by side with the development of heresy, however, grew up tales of secret conventions, in which the sectaries worshiped the demon in the form of a

¹⁵Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, I; 84, 369; 85, 374.

¹⁶Burchard, *Decret*, XI, 1. Gratian, *Decret.*, II, XXVII, CV.

goat or cat and celebrated their impious rites.] Such stories were told of the Cathari in the eleventh century and of their successors in later times.¹⁷ Bizouard states that from the eighth century, multitudes of women met at night to dance and attend banquets, but that probably to astonish credulous persons and to hide from good Christians the place of their reunion, they feigned to make the trip rapidly through the air, mounted on beasts.¹⁸ In the thirteenth century the Dominican Thomas of Cantimpré speaks of demons who carry away women, replacing them with insensible images who are sometimes buried as dead.¹⁹

This belief was thoroughly implanted in the popular mind and when the wise-women were interrogated as to their dealings with Satan, they confessed, under great torture, their nocturnal flights. Between judge and victim a coherent story was easily built up, combining the ancient popular belief with the heretical meetings and the time soon came when no witch's confession was complete without an account of her attendance at the Sabbat.

Details of the Sabbat in different countries varied little, as can be seen from the testimony of the witches. The first act of the witch in preparation for the gathering was to secure a consecrated Host, by pretending to receive Holy Communion and to carry It home. On this a toad was fed, which was afterwards burned and its ashes mixed with the blood of an unbaptized infant, the powdered bone of a man who had been hanged and with a certain herb. With this unguent, the witch anointed the palms of her hands, or her wrists, and a stick, on which she was immediately transported to the place of meeting—in Germany, the Brocken; in Sweden, the Blockula; in France, the Ardennes, and in Italy, a place

¹⁷Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, CIX, 366.

¹⁸Bizouard, *Des Rapports de l'Homme avec le Démon*, Paris, 1863, I, 469.

¹⁹Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum Universale*, lib., II, c. 56.

near Benevento. There were two classes of Sabbat, the great Sabbat, corresponding to the solemn feasts of Christianity and held in distant places, and the little Sabbat, of which the assistants were few and which was held in a village or hamlet.²⁰ For these meetings, the witches gathered from all places, according to their own testimony, some traveling on broomsticks, others mounted on demons in the shape of a goat, a dog or some other animal,²¹ most of them taking some offering, such as an unbaptized child, to placate their evil master.²² Satan generally celebrated a grotesque mockery of the Mass, where everything was done contrary to the holy Christian Sacrifice—thus, for instance, the host used was black and triangular in form; the ceremonies were impious and obscene. This hellish rite was followed by dancing and revelry, frequently by a banquet and, though they ate to satiety, they were still unsatisfied. Sometimes the bodies of children were burned or boiled and the fat was kept to be used in divination. At the close of the meeting, Satan usually addressed a discourse to his assembled servants; he told them they had no souls, that there was no future life, they were not to go to church or confession, or if they did so, they must say, "By leave of our master." He conjured them to do all the evil possible and at the following Sabbat he rewarded their diligence in that line, or punished those who had failed in obedience. Many of the witches testified to the severe punishments inflicted by their lord and master, upon those who failed to please or satisfy him.

This Sabbat was only the pastime of the witch, her real occupation consisted in doing works of evil. Since she had abandoned herself soul and body to Satan, she was his chosen instrument for carrying out his malignant

²⁰Bizouard, op. cit., I, 120.

²¹Prierias, *De Strigimagarum Daemonumque Mirandis*, Rome, 1575, lib., I, c. XIV, 115.

²²Ivo, *Decretum*, XI, c. 56, p. 758. *Quicumque nocturna sacrificia daemonum celebraverunt.*

CHAPTER II

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF WITCHCRAFT

Few things are so indestructible as a superstitious belief once fairly implanted in the minds of men. It passes from one race to another, is handed down from one generation to the next; it adapts itself successively to every form of religion and though persecution may stifle its outward manifestation, it will continue to be cherished in secret, all the more earnestly perhaps, because it is unlawful. These statements are particularly true of the occult arts, which exercised such an influence over the life and actions of the peoples of antiquity as well as over those of later times. From the earliest periods of which we have records, there have been practitioners of magic, credited with the powers of divination, of control over the laws of nature and of intercourse with the spirit world. These practitioners of the occult, the witches of later times, were found among the Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians and Jews as well as among the Greeks and Romans; the evil spirits they controlled were supposed to be either of supernatural origin, as it was believed among the Babylonians, or the souls of the damned seeking revenge, as the Egyptians held. The barriers separating the material from the spiritual world were considered flimsy and communication between them was so frequent that it caused no comment. Thus the medieval belief in the possibility of intercourse between men and demons was but the voicing of a belief which had existed for centuries. "The Assyrians had their Lil and Lilit, the Gauls their Dusii, spirits of either sex . . . while the Welsh legends of the middle ages show the continuance of the belief among the Celtic tribes. The Jews had their legends of Lilith, the first wife of Adam and mother of a great multitude of demons. The

hero worship of Greece consisted mainly in this intercourse and the simpler Roman religion had its Fauns and Sylvens, who, according to St. Augustine, were commonly called incubi.²⁸

Witchcraft and magic played a conspicuous part in Babylon and Egypt, as existing records show. The Code of Hammurabi (2000 B. C.) appointed the ordeal of water for a man accused of witchcraft and for his accuser. If the accused was drowned, his property went to the accuser; if he was saved, the accuser was put to death and his property went to the accused.²⁹ Great stress was laid on the power of words, the utterance of a hidden name, or the mere existence of the name on an amulet or stone. Magic was supposed to be the triumph of intellect over matter, the word was the key to the mysteries of the physical world; if the name of a malignant influence was uttered, its power was undone; if the name of a benevolent deity was spoken, force went out to destroy the adversary.³⁰ Another prevalent idea was that of substitution; that is, the person to be affected by the spell was replaced by his image, generally in wax, over which the incantations were said. The magic circle used almost universally was a mimic wall against the wicked spirits outside and originated in Chaldea under the name of *usurtu*, made with a sprinkling of lime and flour.³¹ These same ideas seem to persist in the magic practices of all peoples both of pre-Christian and Christian times, though it cannot be said that one national system of magic depended upon another.

After Babylonia, Egypt was foremost in magic; exorcisms against all sorts of diseases are found in the records and ancient Egyptian literature abounds in references to the occult art.³² Yet in Egypt the magic used seems to

²⁸Lea, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, 383; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, c. 23.

²⁹Arendzen, *Cath. Ency.*, XI.; art., *Occult Arts*.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*

have been chiefly of a medicinal character and not practised for the working of evil. Egyptian legend spoke of a magician Teta, who worked miracles before Cheops (3800 B. C.) and Greek tradition tells of Nectanebus, last native king of Egypt (358 B. C.) as the greatest of magicians.³³

The Jews were firm believers in magic, as is evidenced by the strict laws against it and by the warnings of the prophets.³⁴ The Hebrews had many classes of practitioners, among them the At, or charmer; the As-shaph, or sorcerer; the Ob or Baal Ob, the consulter with evil spirits (the Witch of Endor was a Baalath Ob); the Chober Chaber, or worker with spells and ligatures, and many others.³⁵ Despite the prohibitions, Jewish magic flourished, especially just before the birth of Christ, while Origen testifies that in his time to adjure demons was looked upon as specifically Jewish and that these adjurations had to be made in Hebrew and from Solomon's books.³⁶

The Aryan races of Asia were somewhat less addicted to magic practices than the Semitic races, yet the Persians, after their conquest of the Chaldean Empire, absorbed the magical practices as well as other Chaldean characteristics. The Indians were originally free from this practice, but later adopted it, and the Yatudhana, or sorcerer of the Vedas, seems to have possessed powers virtually the same as those of the medieval sorcerer; he could, through magic, cause the death of his enemies, destroy their crops and herds and by charmed images (figurines) produce illness or other evils.³⁷

In Europe, the Greeks, Romans, Teutons, and Celts were all practitioners to a greater or less degree, of the magic arts. At first the magic of the Greeks consisted

³³Arendzen, Cath. Ency., XI, Art., Occult Arts.

³⁴Deut., XVIII, 10; Mich., V, 11.

³⁵Lea, op. cit., 388.

³⁶Arendzen, loc. cit.; Migne P. G., XIII, 1757.

³⁷Lea, op. cit., III, 387.

chiefly in attributing supernatural power to inanimate things; they had little need to invoke evil spirits, nor did they understand the distinction of illicit means for unjust ends, since their gods were subject to all the weaknesses of mortals and were supposedly ever ready to use their power, irrespective of justice and morality. Goetic magic—the invocation of malignant spirits for wrongful ends—explains such practices as were attributed to the Cretan Dactyls, to Medea, to Circe and to Hecate.³⁸ The last-named, though originally a foreign deity, was the patroness of witches and represents the concentrated essence of witchcraft. Hecate worship was universal in Greece, though the rites varied in different parts of the country. Her statues were erected before houses and at cross-roads and such Hecatea were consulted as oracles. When foreign elements had almost destroyed the old religion, Hecate still held her rights and was frequently invoked even by strangers. She was invariably hideous, though her appearance varied with circumstances and she may be said to be more typical of the later developments of the witch than of those of her own day.

The Greeks regarded the witches of Thessaly as the most noted and possessed of the greatest learning. They were skilled in the making of magic salves, in the use of poisons, and in the moulding of effigies. They were perhaps less awful than Hecate, but none the less feared, especially on account of their practice of using the flesh of the dead for their concoctions and philters.

Grecian witchcraft received a new impulse at the time of the Persian wars, for with Darius and Xerxes were introduced the magic practices of the Zoroastrians. Later, after the Greek invasions of Persia and Assyria, Chaldean thought so completely influenced Greece that the word Chaldean came to be synonymous with magician

³⁸Odyss., X, 211-396; Ovid, Metam., VII, 365-367.

or sorcerer. With this foreign occupation of Hellenic soil, the witch became more dangerous, because she concentrated her malignity on one object, and thus became an instrument of private vengeance and a force detrimental to social welfare. This change in the ancient conception of a witch was natural enough, for in Chaldea women took a foremost part in practising the worst kinds of magic. Little by little, Grecian witchcraft became so complex that it embraced everything popularly associated with the word, including a complete understanding of hallucinations, dreams, divinations, as well as a knowledge of the uses of waxen images, useful poisons, and narcotics. Witchcraft was too closely connected with religion to meet with much adverse criticism, and though some laws existed against it, the Greek witch had little to fear from persecution, and her medieval sister might well regard the days of Hellas as her golden age.

The Romans, like the Greeks, imported some of their witchcraft from abroad; as in Greece, too, the characteristics of a witch were in some respects identical with those of a goddess. The gods of the lower world furnished a link between the ceremonies of the priest and the incantations of the witch, for while they were the objects of worship to the pious, they were also the customary sources of the magician's power. Lucan's witch Erichtho works her spells with the bones and ashes of the dead, she wanders among tombs, from which she draws their shades.³⁹ Horace's Canidia and Sagana seek their power at the same source and the description of their evil doings bears a great resemblance to that which was attributed to witches sixteen centuries later. In all allusions to Roman sorcery, the deities invoked are infernal and the rites are celebrated at night.⁴⁰ The waxen image of the person to be assailed, familiar to Hindu, Egyptian, and Greek sorcery, assumes in Rome the shape in which

³⁹Lucan, *Pharsalia*, VI, 507-528; 534-537; 567-569.

⁴⁰Horace, *Satires*, I, VIII; *Epod.*, V.

it is found in the middle ages. If a mortal disease was to be induced in a victim, a needle was thrust into the corresponding part of the image; if he was to waste away with an incurable malady, the figure was melted with incantations before a fire⁴¹ It must be observed that the magician was almost always an old woman, the *saga*, *strix* or *volatica*, corresponding to the hag who almost monopolized witchcraft in medieval Europe. The male sorcerer in Rome, like his modern descendant, had the power of transforming himself into a wolf and was thus the prototype of the werewolves, who form a picturesque feature in the history of witchcraft.⁴² Philters and charms for exciting desire or arousing hatred were prevalent and the witches gained skill in the use of poisons, which art gradually became widespread in practice, as can be proved by the many laws enacted against poisoners. As morality was enforced by the Roman laws upon social rather than religious grounds, witchcraft was forbidden only in so far as it interfered with the welfare of the state, and even, when later some kinds of magic were forbidden, it was still considered not unlawful to use certain magical rites to cure disease or save the harvest.

As the influence of Greek thought on Roman life increased, the Roman idea of witchcraft was modified. Oriental magic came in by way of Greece, and at Rome Egyptian witches were much honored and often consulted. It is impossible to determine when Diana came to be regarded as queen of the witches, holding a similar position to that of Hecate in Greece, but a fragment dating from the ninth century describes her as present at the witches' Sabbath.⁴³

The emperors held divergent views on the matter of witchcraft, and though officially many of them forbade magic, yet unofficially they were not averse to making

⁴¹Ovid, *Amor.*, III, VII, 29-34; Horace, *Sat.*, I, VIII, 29-32, 42-43.

⁴²Augustine, *op. cit.*, XVIII, c. 18.

⁴³P. L., CXXXII, 352.

use of such practices themselves. The darker practices of magic, however, were repressed with relentless rigor and the performance of nocturnal rites with the object of bewitching any one was punished with the severest penalties known to Roman law, crucifixion or the beasts.⁴⁴ With the triumph of Christianity the circle of forbidden practices was greatly enlarged. Constantine in 319, threatened with burning the *haruspex* who ventured to cross another's threshold even on the pretext of friendship. Constans went a step farther than his predecessor and issued a number of laws destined to destroy the pagan cult, but above all to root out magic. He declared that since sorcerers were enemies of the human race, they were to be tortured in a measure befitting their crime.⁴⁵ During the short reigns of Julian the Apostate and Jovian, sorcerers and diviners profited by the favor of the former and the tolerance of the latter. Valentinian I and his brother Valens adopted measures for the rapid destruction of paganism. In 364 Valentinian prohibited nocturnal assemblies, magic ceremonies and sacrifice to demons; in 373, in concert with his brother he instituted a persecution against diviners.⁴⁶ The succeeding emperors followed the same rule and in 409 Honorius ordered all the mathematicians (*astrologers*) to leave Rome and the cities of the empire, to burn their books, and swear fidelity to the Christian religion. Yet the laws were not rigidly executed, and the Roman empire was divided among the barbarian tribes without crushing from the hearts of the people their faith in divination or their belief in magic, distinguished only in degree from the cult of the gods and destined to become in the future the cult of demons.

⁴⁴Livy, XXXIX, 41; Tacit. *Annal.*, II, 32; IV, 22, 52; XVI, 28-31; Seneca, *Quest. Natural.*, IV, c. 7; LL., XII Tab., VIII.

⁴⁵Maury, *La Magie et l'Astrologie dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1862, Vol. III.

⁴⁶Beugnot, *Histoire de la destruction du paganisme en Occident*, Paris, 1824, II, 235.

The barbarians brought with them their own superstitions, to which they readily added such as they found among their new subjects, yet the Ostrogoths, who occupied Italy soon became so romanized that they adopted and enforced the Roman laws against magic. The Visigoths who settled in Aquitaine and Spain, though less civilized than the eastern branch, were also influenced by Roman legislation and their chiefs repeatedly issued laws against the forbidden practices of magic. The penalties, however, were less rigid than those imposed by the Romans. The usual punishment for those who invoked demons or produced storms, or used charms to injure men and cattle, was scourging with 200 lashes, or shaving followed by imprisonment. These provisions remained the law of the Spanish peninsula until the fourteenth century.⁴⁷

Druidism seems to have been the religion of the Celts when they settled in Gaul, and druidism, in common with all polytheistic religions, had added magic rites to its primitive teachings.⁴⁸ Little is known of the magic practices of these people except that they had much respect for divination and for the mistletoe; their druidesses were held in great veneration and the people believed they could raise and quiet storms.⁴⁹

Of all the invaders of western Europe, the Teutonic tribes had the least to learn from the conquered peoples in the matter of magic arts, for probably in no other race has the supernatural formed a larger portion of daily life. Divination was practiced extensively, gifted beings could fortell the future by second sight or by incantations; the Vala or prophetess was worshiped as superhuman.⁵⁰ The Norse sagas give a clear idea of the important part played by the sorcerers or magicians in the

⁴⁷M. G. H., LL.; Wisigoth, II, IV, 1; VI, 4.

⁴⁸Cauzons, *La Magie et la Sorcellerie en France*, Paris, 1909, II, 60.

⁴⁹Duruy, *Historie des Romains*, Paris, 1883; III, 118.

⁵⁰Grimm, *op. cit.*, III, 1028; Tacitus, *Germania*, VIII.

CHAPTER III

THE CHURCH, 1-800 A. D.

From earliest Christian times, teachers of the Church, relying on the Old and New Testaments,⁵⁶ contended or taught that the warrant for belief in the existence of evil spirits and their influence on human beings belonged to revealed religion and that neither the possibility nor the reality of such intercourse could be questioned. The Church Fathers fully agreed in regarding demons as the actual instigators of magic. They taught, however, that man might be protected against the enticements of the evil one, by recourse to the Sacraments and other spiritual aids of the Church. On the other hand they held that man could voluntarily enter the devil's service and by apostasy make a compact with the spirit of darkness. Apostasy of this sort and such full surrender to the powers and kingdom of the devil, which often went to the length of worship of Satan, constituted the worst form of heresy, and merited severe punishment. It should be remembered that European Christianity existed for centuries side by side with paganism; Manichaeism introduced the devil-worship of Persia into the Christian west and the Germanic nations brought with them belief in intercourse with devils. Thus the false ideas never entirely disappeared and most of the heresies were mixed with superstitious beliefs. The various tribes, Goths, Franks, Saxons, after their conversion, though nominally Christians, yet retained many of their pagan ideas, chief among which was their belief in the intercourse with spirits.

For the early Christians, the entire world was divided between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

⁵⁶Leviticus, XX, 27; I Kings, XXVIII, 10; Acts, VIII, 9-24; XIII, XVI, 16; XIX, 13, 15.

six compurgators.⁵⁴ The other codes are silent on the subject.

In English history witchcraft in a vague and general sense is something very old; the word witchcraft itself dates from Anglo-Saxon days, but the idea was not clearly defined in the minds of ordinary Englishmen until after the beginning of severe legislation upon the subject, in the fifteenth century. As early as the seventh century, however, Theodore of Tarsus imposed penances upon magicians and enchanters and the laws, from Alfred the Great on, frequently mentioned the subject.⁵⁵ From these passages, the meaning of the word witch may be deduced, namely, one who used spells and charms and who was assisted by evil spirits to accomplish certain ends. Nothing was yet said about the transformation of witches into other shapes nor was there any mention of a compact with Satan, nor any allusion to the nocturnal meetings or Sabbats. These ideas, which were already prevalent in Europe, reached England probably in the fourteenth century.

Such were the beliefs and practices of the races with which the Church had to deal in her efforts to obliterate paganism and sorcery. How far in particular cases the power of the devil extends over man and the visible manifestations of nature, is a question which has occupied theologians from the earliest to the present times,⁵⁶ the Church itself has not spoken decisively on the matter. Since, however, most of the heresies were mixed up with superstitious ideas, the shepherds of the Church, as well as the councils, were compelled at times to take measures against heretical teaching, against magic and sorcery, against popular superstition and against pagan or semi-pagan beliefs. What such measures were will be shown in the following chapters.

⁵⁴M. G. H., LL. Salic. Tit., XXII.

⁵⁵Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, London, 1840, I, 41. Wright, *A Contemporary Narrative of the Proceedings Against Dame Alice Kyteler*. London, 1843, introd. I-III.

the other of darkness, where are the angels of Satan. The writer then explains in detail; in the way of darkness or eternal death, are found all those things which cause men to lose their souls, among such acts are homicide, idolatry, pride, poisoning, magic,⁵⁹ which are to be detested and avoided with the greatest care. The author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* advises Christians not to fear the devil, but to fear God and, fearing Him, they will rule the devil, because he will have no power over them. He continues, "Fearing God, you will fear the works of the devil, idolatry, divination, etc., and you will abstain from doing them."⁶⁰

Later Tatian wrote to the Greeks that frequently those who were sick, or in love, or who through hatred wished to be revenged accepted the demons as helpers. These demons by their arts turned men aside from the pious acknowledgment of God and led them to place confidence in herbs and roots.⁶¹ Tertullian in his treatise on the soul, asks "What shall we say about magic? Say, to be sure, it is an imposture. It is a manifold pest of the mind, the destroyer of our salvation and our soul at one swoop." Again he says that there is hardly a human being who is unattended by a demon, and it is well known to many that premature and violent deaths which men ascribe to accidents are in fact brought about by demons.⁶² Irenaeus writing in the second century speaks of philtres and love-potions given to women by the heretic Marcus.⁶³ Hippolytus, as quoted by Origen in his *Contra Haereses*, speaks of magic practices and shows their connection with heresy, because, he says, "heresiarchs, astonished at the art of the sorcerers, have imitated them."

⁵⁹Barnabas, Epistula XVIII-XXI, ed II. Funk, Patres Apostolici.

⁶⁰Hermas, Mandatum XII. ed II Funk, op. cit.

⁶¹P. G. VI, 826, 839.

⁶²Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Leipsic, 1890. Vol. XX, De Anima, 391.

⁶³P. G. VII, Contra Haereses, 1. I, Cap. 13, De Marci praestigiis et nefariis artibus.

He gives many examples of the magician's art, as he desires to warn the multitude, that they may not be deceived by the arts of the magicians.⁶⁴

Athanasius declares that the sign of the cross makes the illusions of the devil vanish and says that if any one wishes to make a trial of this let him come amidst the delusions of the devil and the impostures of magic and use the sign of the cross, then he will see how the devils fly away and the enchantments of magic remain destitute of their usual force.⁶⁵ St. John Chrysostom also speaks of the power the demons possess over human beings, by the permission of God, which power serves for the punishment of the wicked and the justification of the good.⁶⁶

St. Augustine, to whom frequent reference was made in later centuries, has much to say regarding the nature and power of demons. According to him, we must believe them to be spirits eager to inflict harm, utterly alien from righteousness, swollen with pride, subtle in deceit, who dwell in the air as in a prison. They tyrannize over many men, who are unworthy of participation in the true religion.⁶⁷ He declares the magic art to be impious, as it is dependent on the assistance of malign spirits.⁶⁸ In Book XXI of the *City of God*, he says that devils seduce men, either by imbuing their hearts with a secret poison or by revealing themselves under a friendly guise and thus make a few of them their disciples, who in turn become the instructors of the multitude. Hence the origin of magic and magicians. They possess the hearts of men and are chiefly proud of this possession when they transform themselves into angels of light. Many things, therefore, are their doing and these deeds of theirs we ought the more carefully to shun as we acknowledge them

⁶⁴P. G. XVI, l. IV, cap. XXVIII.

⁶⁵Id. XXV. Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi, l. I, 119.

⁶⁶S. Chrysostomi, Opera, Paris, 1839, Vol. II, 290, 306.

⁶⁷Augustine, op. cit., lib. VIII, c. 22.

⁶⁸Id., c. 19.

to be very surprising.⁶⁹ With regard to the transformation of persons into animals, which later became an important part of witchcraft, Augustine says that he heard of such from good authority, but that he thinks if the demons really do these things, they do not create real substances, but only change the appearance of things so as to make them seem what they are not.⁷⁰

The next writer of note to take up the question of magic and witchcraft was Isidore of Seville, who in 630 wrote an encyclopedic work, entitled *Origines* or *Etymologiae*, which is a compendium of the knowledge of his time and was of the greatest importance for the historical literature of the later Middle Ages. In this book he speaks of women who bind themselves to serve Satan, who steal children, and who work harm to their neighbors by spells and charms. He also mentions women who are able to produce storms and who can change themselves or others into animals.⁷¹

Another source of information is the writings of the Popes. Pope Eusebius in 309 wrote that homicides, witches, thieves, etc., were not to be admitted as accusers or witnesses in trials.⁷² In 494 Pope Gelasius I wrote to the bishops of Lucania, that illiterate persons, sorcerers and demoniacs were not to be admitted to Holy Orders.⁷³ Pope Gregory I in April, 595, wrote to the Deacon Cyprian of Syracuse, concerning his predecessor Maximilian, who, it was said, had been defiled by witchcraft, enjoining on Cyprian to take strong measures against the superstition. In July, 599, he wrote to Bishop Januarius of Sardinia to hunt out diviners, sorcerers, and worshipers of idols, and openly preach against them. If any one, in spite of the warning, persisted in the use of such arts, he

⁶⁹Augustine, op. cit., lib. XXI, c. 6.

⁷⁰Id., XVIII, c. 18.

⁷¹P. L. LXXXII, 311.

⁷²Id. VII, 1110.

⁷³Thiel, *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum Genuinae*, Braunsberg, 1898, I, 492.

should be punished by scourging, if a slave; if free, he should do penance.⁷⁴ Two years later the same Pope wrote to the notary Adrian of Palermo to diligently seek out enchanters and sorcerers and such enemies of Christ and punish them severely, "*Studii enim tui sit, sollicita (incantatores et sortilegos) quaerere, et quoscunque huiusmodi Christi inimicos inveneris districta ultione corrigere.*"⁷⁵ In 716, Pope Gregory II instructed his nuncio to Bavaria to proceed with great strictness against soothsayers, witches and augurers.⁷⁶

The practice of invoking the evil spirit for magic rites, prevalent among pagans, was finally adopted by many Christians, hence we find the Church legislating in regard to witchcraft and its allied practices, magic and sorcery. The question of witchcraft was introduced into the Church synods as early as 300, when the synod of Elvira decreed that any one who killed another by witchcraft, should not receive Communion at the hour of death. "*Si quis maleficio interficiat alterum, eo quod sine idololatria perficere scelus non potuit, nec in finem impertiendam illi esse communionem.*"⁷⁷ The oriental synod of Ancyra (314) threatened with five years' penance, soothsayers and those who made use of magic remedies.⁷⁸ A second oriental synod, that of Laodicea (375) declared excommunicate priests and clerics who employed ligatures or amulets and forbade them to be magicians, enchanters or astrologers.⁷⁹

From the fifth century the synods grew more numerous, and in many of the decrees we find enactments regarding witchcraft or sorcery. We notice that the council of Arles (443 or 452) forbade the adoration of trees, fields

⁷⁴M. G. H. Gregori I papae, *Registrum Epistolarum*, II, 183, 185.

⁷⁵Id. *Epis.* II, p. II, 302.

⁷⁶Mansi, *Collectio Amplissima Conciliorum*, Paris, 1901, XII, 257.

⁷⁷Hefele-Leclercq, *Histoire des Conciles*, Tom. I, p. 1, 225.

⁷⁸Id., *op cit.*, 324.

⁷⁹Id., *op. cit.*, I, p. II, 1018.

and springs.⁸⁰ The provincial council of Vannes in Brittany (465) and that of Agde in Languedoc (506) decreed excommunication against clerics and laics who sought the help of witches.⁸¹ The councils of Orleans and Auxerre (511, 533, 541, 573, 603) were equally strict with regard to soothsayers.⁸² The provincial council of Elusa (551) determined that witches or sorcerers, if they were of high rank, should be excommunicated, if slaves, they were to be flogged by the magistrate.⁸³ The council of Tours (567) forbade the reverencing of certain rocks, trees or fountains and such heathenish superstitions.⁸⁴ The diocesan synods of Auxerre (578), Narbonne (589), Rheims (624 or 630),⁸⁵ Rouen (650) forbade the use of sorcery, of the *sortes sanctorum*⁸⁶ and of the superstitious observance of January first.

In Spain the synod of Braga (563) decreed that if anyone believed that the devil could produce by his own power, thunder, lightning, storms, and drought as Priscillian taught, he was to be anathema.⁸⁷ The council of Toledo (633) declared that every cleric who consulted diviners or witches should be deposed and imprisoned in a monastery to do perpetual penance.⁸⁸ A second council in the same city (693) declared that bishops and priests should root out the remnants of paganism, which consisted in making use of charms and exercising magic; if they were not zealous in this work, they were to be deposed and excommunicated for a year. Lay persons who gave themselves to magic practices were to pay three pounds of gold, but if of humble station, they were to

⁸⁰Mansi, op. cit., VI, 881.

⁸¹Id., VII, 955; VIII, 332.

⁸²Hefele-Leclercq, op. cit., II, p. II, 1014.

⁸³Id., III, p. I, 166.

⁸⁴Id., 191.

⁸⁵Id., 214-221; 228-230; 260-264.

⁸⁶The *sortes sanctorum* consisted in opening the Bible or works of the Church Fathers and taking the first verse the eye lighted upon as an answer to a question.

⁸⁷Hefele-Leclercq, op. cit., III, p. I, 177.

⁸⁸Id., 271.

receive 100 lashes.⁸⁹ The eastern synod of Trullo (692) decreed that anyone who questioned a magician concerning the future should be punished for six years; this same synod also forbade the observance of the Brumalia and all pagan customs.⁹⁰ The last synod of the seventh century, dealing with the subject in question was held at Berghamstead, England (697). This synod declared that whoever sacrificed to the devil should have his goods confiscated, if a slave, he was to pay six solidi or be scourged.⁹¹

A council summoned in Rome by Pope Gregory II in 721, declared excommunicate those who consulted soothsayers or witches or who wore amulets.⁹² A second council in Rome in 743 prohibited all pagan observances including the Brumalia (a name for the Roman feast of Saturnalia), the wearing of amulets and ligatures, divination, sorcery and cognate superstitions.⁹³ The synod of Liftina (743 or 745) forbade the wearing of amulets and ligatures.⁹⁴ Boniface, of Cologne (745) ordained that any priest or cleric who used soothsaying, divination or ligatures should receive canonical punishment.⁹⁵ By the Council of Worms (786) soothsayers and magicians were made slaves of the Church.⁹⁶ In the previous year the synods of Paderborn and Attigny decreed that those who, deceived by the devil, believed in pagan superstitions, were witches, and if such persons ate human flesh or caused others to eat it, they were to be put to death.⁹⁷ In 789 the synod of Aachen forbade magic practices to priests and clerics according to the canons of Laodicea.⁹⁸ The most stringent legislation of the period was the edict

⁸⁹Hefele-Leclercq, *op. cit.*, III, par. I, 583.

⁹⁰*Id.*, 570.

⁹¹*Id.*, 589.

⁹²Mansi, *op. cit.*, XII, 261.

⁹³Hefele-Leclercq, *op. cit.*, III, p. II, 852.

⁹⁴*Id.*, 838.

⁹⁵Mansi, XII, 386.

⁹⁶Hefele-Leclercq, III, p. II, 994.

⁹⁷*Id.*, 992.

⁹⁸*Id.*, 1027-1034.

of Charlemagne between 790 and 799, which handed over to the Church the matter of superstitious practices and ordered the archpriest of each diocese to examine those who were accused of sorcery and to imprison them until they confessed and promised to amend.⁹⁹ In his attempts to Christianize Saxony, Charlemagne put to death all who killed witches and ate them, while on the other hand, soothsayers and sorcerers were made over to the Church as slaves.¹⁰⁰ The Bavarian synods of Reisbach, Freising and Salzburg (799-800) decreed that all magicians and witches as well as the *tempestarii* (weather-makers) should be imprisoned by the archpriest and tortured until they confessed, but their life was to be spared.¹⁰¹

The penitentials of this period grouped the witches into two great classes, the *malefici* and the *tempestarii*. To the former division belonged those who through their devices injured or killed, "maleficio interimere, decipere, perdere, occidere, maleficio partum decipere, maleficium esse pro amore, pro inlecebrosio amore dare, veneficio uti, alicujus amoris gratia."¹⁰² For such persons the penance lasted for seven years, but if they also sacrificed to demons, the penance was for ten years. The second group, the *tempestarii* or *immissores tempestatum*, whose mission was to cause great havoc by storms of rain or hail, were also sentenced to seven years penance.

From what are known as the Roman Penitentials, we gain some idea of the penalties incurred by practitioners of the forbidden arts. Thus, "if any one disturbs the minds of men by invocation of the devil he shall do penance for five years on bread and water."¹⁰³ Again, "if any one procures the death of another through witchcraft,

⁹⁹Hansen, *Zauberwahn, Inquisition und Hexenprozess im Mittelalter und die Entstehung der grossen Hexen verfolgung*. Leipzig, 1900, 66.

¹⁰⁰M. G. H., op. cit., 23. *Divinos et sortilegos ecclesiis et sacerdotibus dare constituimus*.

¹⁰¹Hefele-Leclercq, op. cit., III, p. II, 1101; 1237; 1255.

¹⁰²Hansen, op. cit., 145.

¹⁰³Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher und die Bussdisciplin der Kirche*, Mayence, 1883. 303.

he shall have seven years' penance, three of which shall be on bread and water."¹⁰⁴ "Any one who is a producer of tempests (*immissor tempestatum*) seven years' penance."¹⁰⁵ "Any one who makes use of ligatures, three years' penance on bread and water."¹⁰⁶ The Arundel Penitential has an interesting clause concerning the stealing of milk, etc., by charms: "any one who steals milk or honey from others, by means of incantation or witchcraft, shall have three years' heavy penance."¹⁰⁷ For *impotentia ex maleficio* produced by a woman, seven years' penance."¹⁰⁸

The penitentials of the Anglo-Saxon group include those of Theodore of Canterbury, of Bede, and of Egbert, so-called. These agree in most points regarding the practice of witchcraft and the penances to be imposed. Thus, "those who immolate to demons in small things, one year penance, in greater things, ten years."¹⁰⁹ "If a woman works spells by incantation, one year or forty days' penance according to the gravity of the offence."¹¹⁰ "Tempest producers shall have seven years' penance."¹¹¹ "If a woman places her child upon a roof or in an oven to cure him, five years' penance."¹¹² "If any one believes that he was carried through the air at night, by witches, two years' penance."¹¹³

¹⁰⁴Schmitz, *op. cit.*, 307.

¹⁰⁵*Id.*, 308. *Penitentialia Valicellanum I.*

¹⁰⁶*Id.*, 312.

¹⁰⁷*Id.*, 459. *Penitentialia Arundel.*

¹⁰⁸*Id.*, 460.

¹⁰⁹*Id.*, 537.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹¹*Id.*, 577. *Penitentialia Egberti.*

¹¹²*Id.*, 581.

¹¹³*Id.*, 460.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHURCH, 800-1200 A. D.

With the passing centuries, the question of witchcraft, instead of dying out, came into greater prominence, possibly because heresies began to multiply and many of the heretical practices were mingled with those of sorcery. Hence we find the Church recognizing the evil and dealing with it accordingly.

Previous to the year 800 theological writers had confined themselves mainly to the diabolical aspect of sorcery, without touching, except in a few cases, the question of the witch's powers, but with the ninth century came a change in the views of ecclesiastical writers in regard to witchcraft. From this time we see various magical effects examined and explained, although as yet such acts were not attributed exclusively to the power of Satan.

Agobard, the great archbishop of Lyons (d. 841) wrote in 820 that in his diocese, everyone believed in the possibility of tempest-making by witches, that all classes of people believed in a land called Magonia, whence ships came in the clouds and carried back the harvests destroyed by hail;¹¹⁴ the tempestarii, as such sorcerers were called, were paid by the Magonians for creating the storm. Agobard held that only God and His servants could produce storms, that the minions of Satan had not that power; this belief was destined to be later overthrown. Agobard concludes his exposition with the statement, "Christians now believe such silly things as formerly no heathen would have believed."¹¹⁵

Interesting light can be thrown on this question of witchcraft in the Carlovingian period by the works of two writers, Rabanus Maurus and Hincmar. Rabanus

¹¹⁴P. L. CIV, 147.

¹¹⁵Id., 148, 158.

Maurus, abbot of Fulda and later archbishop of Mainz, in 845, wrote a book, *De Universo*, in which he closely followed the treatment of his predecessor, Isidore of Seville, concerning the striga.¹¹⁶ However, he adopted the view accepted by the entire Church at this time that the pagan gods were demons and he was urgent in his demands that the Mosaic sentence against witches and diviners should be carried out in its full rigor.¹¹⁷

Hincmar, archbishop of Rheims, in 860 was called upon to settle the question, brought up by the divorce proceedings between King Lothaire II and Teutberga, as to whether women, by witchcraft, could cause illicit love between men and women and hatred between married persons. In his exposition, Hincmar shows that he was convinced such things could be accomplished, through the union of men and devils, and he further cites examples in his diocese. He speaks of the evils wrought by witches (strigae), "talía sunt etiam genera daemonum qui tantum . . . de quibus aliqua nostri tempore acta dicere poteramus, nisi ea brevitatis compendio transiremus."¹¹⁸ He enumerates the means by which the evil may be done; use of bones of the dead, cords, herbs, food, etc. The fact that such arts exist is for the bishop a sign of the coming of Antichrist. With regard to the power of witches, he says "Alii carminibus a strigiis fascinati et quasi enerves effecti reperti sunt."¹¹⁹

The teaching of the Church in the tenth and eleventh centuries may be gathered from some of the works of Abbot Regino of Prüm (d. 915) and Burchard, bishop of Worms (d. 1025). These two systematic collections of canon law exercised a great influence on the later collections and give a fair idea of the ecclesiastical teaching on such a difficult point as witchcraft. Abbot Regino's book,

¹¹⁶Schmitz, op. cit., 738.

¹¹⁷P. L. CX, Raban. Mauri. Operum, p. II, 1095-1110.

¹¹⁸P. L. CXXV, 716-725.

¹¹⁹Id., 717.

written in 906 at the suggestion of Archbishop Ratbod of Trier, contains advice for the visitation of a diocese; it consists in great part of a collection of the ancient canons of different synods and papal decrees. With various points relating to ecclesiastical discipline the abbot's ideas regarding the witch-belief are also found. He speaks of the evils caused by witches, such as blighting the crops, producing storms, causing love and hatred, etc., and evidently believes in the reality of sorcery, for the practice of which he prescribes seven years penance. Regino's book is of more interest to us, because it is the oldest authentic document concerning the nocturnal flights of women, which later became one of the important admissions in witch-confessions. This document is embodied in his work as the famous "canon episcopi" erroneously attributed to the council of Ancyra, 314. It contains an exhortation to bishops which runs partly as follows: "The bishops and their assistants must work with all their might to eradicate from their dioceses the corrupting arts of soothsaying and sorcery invented by the devil; whenever they find a man or woman given up to this vice, they must turn such persons out of the diocese." After bringing forward proofs to show how much of the old heathen belief in magic had still been retained among the people who had become Christian, the canon continues: "Even now, there are certain wicked women who, misled by the wiles and tricks of the devil, believe and declare that in the nocturnal hours, with Diana, the goddess of the heathen, or with Herodias and in company with innumerable other women, riding on certain animals, they can, in the midnight stillness traverse many lands and they say they must obey the orders of their queen in everything. And these women who have thus fallen away from the faith have not only gone to ruin themselves, but they have dragged many others with them into the destruction of unbelief Therefore the priests in the churches en-

trusted to them, must preach to the people of God with all earnestness and teach them that all these things are nothing, and are not from the Spirit of God, but from the wicked spirit, who puts false ideas into the minds and hearts of believers. Satan, who can take on the appearance of an angel of light, directly he has taken captive the mind of some woman and subjugated her by means of her unbelief, changes into all sorts of forms, conjures up in dreams before the soul he holds in his power, now joyful scenes, now sad ones, now known, now unknown persons; and the victim believes that all these visions are not merely imaginary, but real and actual. . . . Therefore it must be proclaimed to all people that anyone who believes such things has lost the true faith; and whoever has lost the true faith belongs not to God, but to the devil. By the Lord it stands written that all things were made by Him; whoever, therefore, believes that any creature can be changed into a better or worse form, or into any other form, except by the Creator Himself, that person is without doubt an unbeliever and worse than a heathen.¹²⁰

From the preceeding quotations it will be seen that at this time, the Church treated the nightly flights of women as an illusion, but held that a woman could yield to the devil and voluntarily place herself in his service, thus becoming an apostate and worthy of punishment.¹²¹

About a hundred years later, Burchard of Worms (d. 1025) wrote his *Collectarium Canonum* or *Decretum* in twenty books, a compilation of ecclesiastical law and moral theology drawn from the works of his predecessors, from the writings of the Fathers, the penitentials, decrees of councils and popes, and from the Scriptures. Two portions of this great work are of special interest in connec-

¹²⁰P. L. CXXXII, 352; Soldan-Heppe, *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse*, I, 130.

¹²¹Si aliqua est, quae se dicat cum daemonum turba in similitudine mulierum transformata atris noctibus equitare super quasdam bestias et in eorum consortio adnumeratam esse, haec talis omnimodis ex parochia efficiatur.

tion with our subject: Book X, *De incantatoribus et auguribus*, and Book XIX, the *Corrector* or *Medicus*, a penitential. These two books describe in some detail the witch-superstition still developing among the people of Germany and connected with the old heathen ideas. Book X embodies the work of Regino, to which are added citations from St. Augustine and Rabanus Maurus; in one point Burchard disagrees with Regino, namely, in regard to the existence of the *tempestarii*. Burchard holds that witches cannot influence storms, and assigns a penalty for those who hold such a belief. With regard to other deeds of the witches, such as stealing a neighbor's possessions by means of magic formulae, killing domestic animals by a look, blighting crops, etc., Burchard is no wiser than others of his time, but he says positively that no sorcerer can influence the mind of man by magic arts, change love into hatred or vice versa, nor transform men into animals. This tenth book was embodied in the works of Ivo and Gratian and became part of the later canonical literature; but the nineteenth book, in which the night-flights of women were mentioned and belief in them severely reprehended, never became part of ecclesiastical law. Therefore, it was possible when the question of night-flying became an important one in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, for the theologians to meet all objections taken from the Canon *Episcopi* with the explanation that the witches of their time no longer flew in company with Diana or Herodias but were a new class who flew with the help of demons, and that they did not and could not come under the penalty imposed by the Canon *Episcopi*, because they had not existed when the Canon was composed.

In the early part of the twelfth century, Ivo of Chartres (d. 1115) incorporated most of Burchard's tenth book in his own work, the *Panormia* (Book VIII), and in his *Decretal* (Book XI).¹²² In these pages are found ref-

¹²²P. L. CLXI, *Panormia*, lib. VIII; *Decreti*, p. XI.

erences to the metamorphosis of men into animals, the flight of women in company with Diana or Herodias, etc., which Ivo holds to be figments of the imagination. Nevertheless, he believes that some persons, with the aid of the devil, can create storms and disturb the minds of men, but this is only done with God's permission.¹²³ Of more importance for us is the fact that Ivo is the first writer to pay attention to the influence of sorcery or witchcraft upon the consummation of marriage, and to speak of the "impotentia ex maleficio," which constituted an old tenet of the witch-belief. It was this touching of one of the Sacraments which probably aroused the attention of Church authorities and called forth so much active legislation, otherwise it is possible that the canonists and theologians might have had much less to say on the subject. When, however, the marriage bond, always so sacredly protected by the Church, was thus attacked and so many applications for divorce "causa impotentiae ex maleficio" were made, there was nothing for the Church to do but to face the issue and define her position. Ivo, voicing the teaching of the Church says that when it can be proved that the impotentia is the result of witchcraft or sorcery, the man and woman may separate and remarry.¹²⁴ This doctrine was included in the Canon Law and the teaching persisted for several centuries as the Church upheld belief in the reality of magic and this question of divorce for impotentia ex maleficio became one of frequent occurrence. This question was treated in the same way by the great theologians of later times, among whom may be mentioned Peter Lombard,¹²⁵ William of Paris,¹²⁶ Albertus Magnus,¹²⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas,¹²⁸ Pope Innocent V,¹²⁹

¹²³P. L. CLXI, lib. VIII.

¹²⁴P. L. CLXI, Panor. lib. VI, cap. 117. "Si per sortiaras atque maleficias occulto, sed numquam injusto Dei judicio permittente et diabolo praeeparante, concubitus non sequitur . . . separari valebant."

¹²⁵Petri Lombardi, Sentent, lib. IV, dist. 34.

¹²⁶Gulielmi Alverni, Opera Omnia, lib. II, 970, 1106.

¹²⁷Alberti Magni, Compendium theologiae veritatis Comment. IV Sent. Dist. XXXIV, art. 9.

¹²⁸Thomae Aquinatis, Comment. IV, dist. XXIV, ques. 1.

¹²⁹Innocentii V pont. max. ex ordine Praedicatorum assumpti, in IV Libros Sententiarum commentaria, lib. IV, dist. XXIV, art. 4.

John Duns Scotus,¹³⁰ Peter of Aquila,¹³¹ John Tritheimus,¹³² and Bartholomew Spina.¹³³ These writers agree that divorce should be allowed in such cases only if the persons involved have humbled themselves before God, have fasted, prayed and been exorcised.

Besides the above-mentioned books there is the Decree of Gratian, a vast collection of canonical laws, which was completed in Bologna about 1140 and which marks the beginning of the new law development in the Church. This decree, the first part of which is embodied in the *Corpus Juris Canonici*, possesses great authority, and through its adoption by the canonical school is highly esteemed as a source of the Church's law. Gratian collects the various decrees on magic practices in Causa XXVI, quaestiones 1-6, in which he speaks of divination, incantation, soothsaying, witchcraft, for all of which practices excommunication is the penalty. "Si quis ariolos, aruspices, vel incantatores observauerit . . . anathema sit."¹³⁴ "Sortilegos velut Christi inimicos, districta ultione corrigere."¹³⁵ "Excommunicetur clericus, monachus, laicus divinationes, vel augurias vel sortes secutus."¹³⁶

Abelard (d. 1142) who exercised such a great influence on the philosophers and theologians of the thirteenth century, says nothing directly concerning magic practices, but he declares that the devil has vast knowledge and that God permits him to tempt men, suggesting to them many illusions; he also says that the sorcerers of Egypt in the time of Moses worked many wonders.¹³⁷

¹³⁰Johannis Duns Scotus, Quaestiones in Petri Lombardi Libros Sent. lib. IV, dist. 34.

¹³¹Petrus de Aquila, Super quatuor libros magistri Sententiarum, lib. IV, dist. 34.

¹³²Hansen, Quellen, op. cit., 294.

¹³³Id., 329.

¹³⁴Gratian, Decretum Gratiani emendatum et notationibus illustratum. Rome, 1582, II, C. XXVI, qu. 5, c. 1.

¹³⁵Id., c. 8.

¹³⁶Id., c. 2.

¹³⁷P. L. CLXXVIII, Petri Abelardi, P. II, Sermones, cap. IV, 647.

Such a distinguished scholar as John of Salisbury (d. 1180), the most widely read student in classical literature produced by the Middle Ages, and a pupil of Abelard, openly manifested the belief in the reality of witchcraft, which he held in union with the entire Christian world. In his great work, the *Polycraticus*, composed in the years 1156-1159, he treats the subjects of dream-life and the night-flights of women with a truly critical spirit, but he declares there is no doubt about the reality of witchcraft, and says that he himself in his youth had been consecrated with the necessary chrism by a conjuring priest. The *maleficium*, according to him, as also to St. Augustine and Isidore was carried out by a "pestifera familiaritas daemonum et hominum."¹³⁸ With regard to the possibility of weather-making, he follows the opinions of his predecessors "Magi qui Domino permittente elementa concutunt, ventura, plerumque pronunciant, turbant mentes hominum."

The same attitude is shown by another scholar of the time, Peter of Blois (d. 1180), who declares against the interpretation of dreams, yet says that certain women, by the suggestion of the devil, form terrene and material images to afflict their enemies or inflame their loved ones.¹³⁹

The Magister Sententiarum, Peter Lombard (d. between 1160-64), mentions the subject in the *Sentences*. In Book II he says that God allows the devil to make use of magic arts in order to warn the faithful and try the good, also that God gives power to the devil to tempt men.¹⁴⁰

In this period we find no papal decrees bearing on the subject, but several popes in letters to bishops or abbots mentioned the practice of sorcery and witchcraft and declared the lawful punishment for such evils. Thus Leo IV

¹³⁸P. L. CXCIX, *Polycraticus*, lib. II, cap. XXVII.

¹³⁹P. L. CCVII, 190.

¹⁴⁰Petri Lombardi, *Sentent. Lib. II, dist. 6, 7.*

in 849 wrote to the bishops of Britain that witches and diviners should be punished with anathema,¹⁴¹ and in 890 Stephen V threatened with deprivation of the Holy Sacrament, all those who sought the aid of the devil and also advised his councillors to put in practice the words of God to Moses: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."¹⁴² Leo VII between 937 and 939 wrote to the bishops of Germany concerning enchanter and witches that they should be punished, yet not exterminated according to the Mosaic law, but rather that they should be urged to give up their evil practices and to come back to the Church.¹⁴³ The great Gregory VII wrote to Harold of Denmark in 1080 that he must no longer tolerate among his people the gruesome superstition according to which Christian priests or wicked women were held answerable for bad weather, storms, unfruitful years or outbreaks of plagues.¹⁴⁴

Church synods took up the question of witchcraft and legislated concerning it; from a consideration of the various places in which these councils were held we see how widespread the practice was. The ninth century opened with an Irish synod (800) which declared that any Christian who believed in the existence of witches or who led others to believe in them should be anathema.¹⁴⁵ At Worms (829) the Frankish bishops declared that many evil deeds were being committed, among them sorcery, soothsaying, poisoning, and witchcraft, and that persons practising such should be treated without mercy.¹⁴⁶ At the synod of Pavia (850) presided over by Archbishop Angilbert of Milan the Italian bishops asserted that magic arts were on the increase in Italy and the synod decreed that women who practised witchcraft should suffer the most severe penalty and only upon their death-

¹⁴¹P. L. CXV, 668; Gratian, op. cit., C. XXVI, qu. 5, c. 7.

¹⁴²Langen, Geschichte der Römischen Kirche, III, 293.

¹⁴³Mansi, op. cit., XVIII, 378.

¹⁴⁴Jaffé, Regesta Pontificum Romanorum. Berlin, 1851. II, 413.

¹⁴⁵Haddan and Stubbs, Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland. Oxford, 1869-78. II, 329.

¹⁴⁶Mansi, op. cit., XIV, 529.

beds, after a searching examination, should they be received again into the communion of the Church.¹⁴⁷ In the same year a synod at Rome declared that women who bewitched others to love or hate, or procured their death, should be severely punished.¹⁴⁸ Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims, in 859, summoned a council at Metz, which decreed death to all practitioners of the witch's art, "*impios de terra perdere . . . veneficos, sacrilegos non sinere vivere.*"¹⁴⁹ Bishop Herard of Tours (855) declared that sorcerers, *tempestarii* and enchanterers should do public penance.¹⁵⁰ In 895 the bishops at the synod of Tribur summoned by King Arnulf, decreed that any man or woman who worked harm through poison, herbs or magic should be punished as a murderer with double fines.¹⁵¹ A council in southern Italy, of uncertain time and place, declared that the arts of magic and soothsaying should be annihilated.¹⁵²

England, too, had its share in the work. In 1009 a council held at Enham under the patronage of King Ethelred declared that enchanterers, magicians and witches should be expelled from the kingdom.¹⁵³

In Spain the council of Coyaca (1050) decreed excommunication for all those who practised witchcraft or magic.¹⁵⁴ In 1090 a council in Bohemia warned the faithful not to have recourse to magicians in times of distress or sickness, but it only prescribed confession and repentance with abstinence from a repetition of the offense. In 1092 the council of Szaboles in Hungary allowed a bishop to punish witches as he thought fit—"meretrices et

¹⁴⁷Hefele-Leclercq, op. cit., Tom IV, p. I, 186.

¹⁴⁸Id., 189.

¹⁴⁹Id., 215.

¹⁵⁰P. L. CXXI, 764, "*de maleficis, incantatoribus, divinis . . . tempestariis et de mulieribus veneficis et quae diversa fingunt portenta ut prohibeantur et publica poenitentia multentur.*"

¹⁵¹Hefele-Leclercq, op. cit., IV, p. I, 695.

¹⁵²Mansi, op. cit., 18a, 433.

¹⁵³Hefele-Leclercq, op. cit., IV, p. II, 914.

¹⁵⁴Id., 1064.

strigae, secundum quod episcopo visum fuerit, tali modo dijudicentur."¹⁵⁵

Bishop Otto of Bamberg in 1124 summoned a council in Pomerania, in which he forbade Christians to have recourse to witchcraft or to question soothsayers.¹⁵⁶

The next year the council of London declared excommunicate those who had recourse to witches and sorcerers. "Sortilegos, ariolos et auguria quaeque sectantes, eisque consentientes, excommunicari praecipimus, perpetuaque notamus infamia."¹⁵⁷ The council of Rouen (1190) also decreed excommunicate all poisoners and witches.¹⁵⁸

During these centuries, the legislation of the Church, to judge from the penalties imposed, was extremely mild, though the penitentials vary somewhat in the length of time for which the sorcerer or practitioner of witchcraft was compelled to do penance. The first important penitential of the time is that of Halitgar, bishop of Cambrai, written between 817 and 831. Much of it is based on the older penitentials and the fourth book only is of value to us. In the twenty-fifth canon we read that those who seek diviners or others using magic arts must do penance for fifty days.¹⁵⁹ Again, "those making use of enchantments shall be separated from the Church."¹⁶⁰ "Neither shall Christians observe the traditions of the Gentiles, nor make use of incantations."¹⁶¹

The Corrector of Burchard, to which reference has been made, decrees that at confession every penitent should be asked the following questions: Have you believed that some people can raise storms or change the minds and hearts of men? Have you believed that there are women, who by their magic power can turn love into hatred, hatred into love, and by their witchcraft steal

¹⁵⁵Mansi, op. cit., XX, 777.

¹⁵⁶M. G. H. Leg. VI, 263.

¹⁵⁷Mansi., op. cit., XXI, 332.

¹⁵⁸Hefele, Konziliengeschichte, V, 665; Mansi, XXI, 581.

¹⁵⁹Schmitz, op. cit., V, 727.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

and injure the possessions of others? Have you believed that certain women ride forth at night, in company with devils, whom they are obliged to serve? Have you believed what certain women are accustomed to believe, that you, with devils, in the silence of the night, have been raised into the clouds and have fought with others and that you have wounded others and have been wounded by them?" If the penitent answered these questions in the affirmative, a suitable penance of one year was imposed upon him.¹⁶² In Book X there is also an enumeration of special practices with the penalties attached. "Any one who introduces sorcerers into his house, five years' penance." "Enchanters and sorcerers must be sought out as enemies of Christ and chastised severely. If a bishop, priest or deacon consults sorcerers, he must be degraded and imprisoned in a monastery to do perpetual penance. Enchanters, witches, tempest-makers, or those who invoke demons to disturb men's minds, must be fully punished. Whoever celebrates nocturnal sacrifices to demons, or invokes them, shall be severely punished. A woman who makes use of diabolical incantations must do penance for a year or for three times forty days. Bishops should instruct the people regarding the pernicious arts of the devil and if they find men or women given up to such, they must put them out of the parish, for they are led captive by the devil. If any woman says she can change love to hate, or that she goes travelling with other women at night, let her be put out of the parish."¹⁶³

The position of the Church at the end of the twelfth century may be briefly summed up as follows: In the earlier centuries it was against the mere belief in witchcraft that the Church fulminated her decrees; the interrogatories already quoted show with sufficient clearness

¹⁶²P. L. CXL, 950-1014. Credidisti quod multae mulieres retro Satanam conversae credunt, ut, januis clausis, exire posse et terrarum spatia pertransire valere, etc.

¹⁶³Ibid.

A that her position toward the question was one of incredulity; she forbade her children to believe in the possibility or reality of such phenomena. After the ninth century, however, a gradual change seemed to pervade her pronouncements—she seemed to accept the reality of witchcraft and issued her prohibitions against its practice by the faithful. She admitted that persons under the influence of the devil, were able to do much harm; she formulated certain laws regarding marriage and divorce, but the penalties prescribed for practitioners of the magic art, were, on the whole, extremely light, and in general it may be said that the Church seemed unable to cope with the growing superstition.

CHAPTER V

THE CHURCH, 1200-1700

THEOLOGICAL WRITERS

With the change in the idea and attributes of a witch that came in the thirteenth century, a mass of popular literature sprang up, by which the minds of many people were turned towards the demoniacal and for numbers of men and women, Satan became, their whole lives through, the dominant idea. This was particularly true of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the doctrines of Luther had permeated all classes of society and were producing their terrible results. The demoralization resulting everywhere from the religious, social, and political movements and struggles, was especially favorable to the development of the witch-superstition and procured for it an extension undreamed of before.

There were many ecclesiastical writers of this time who treated the most important points of the witchcraft question. The first, in point of time was Caesarius of Heisterbach who wrote his *Dialogus Miraculorum* in 1225. This work contains an exposition of many well-known practices; what forms the devil takes, how all sickness and disasters are produced by the influence of the devil with the permission of God; how devils take the form of women and kill children with a look, etc.¹⁶⁴

Much more important was the work, *De Universo* of William of Auvergne, the well-known Paris bishop (d. 1249) which greatly influenced the development of theological studies in Paris. He realized that philosophy had not fully settled the question of witchcraft, neither had it made clear the nature of the evil demons nor their wickedness. "De eo vero si demones a foris obsidere possunt,

¹⁶⁴Caesarius of Heisterbach. Cologne, 1475. *Dialogus* XI, 63; III, 6, 7, 8.

in quanta longitudine hoc possint, philosophia nondum determinavit, quia neque naturam malignorum spiritum neque malitiam ad liquidam declaravit.¹⁶⁵ According to William of Paris, demons could raise storms, wreck ships, burn houses and cities, while persons with their help, could perform all sorts of evil deeds. The bishop also refers to many of the well-known practices of witches, such as the Sabbats, etc., but says they no longer existed in his time, yet he holds it for a truth that demons, with the permission of God, kill children in order to punish the parents. The difference between his view of the night-rides and the popular belief, as he shows in his writing, is that he does not believe the witches to be really women, but demons who delude men by many expedients. Stephen of Bourbon in 1261 held the same opinion, namely, that the devils assumed the appearance of women and killed children upon the nightly journeys.

The versatile Roger Bacon (d. 1294) was in advance of his time in his treatment of nature and her laws, as is shown in his letter *De Nullitate magiae*, in which he says that magic is opposed to philosophy; that charms and enchantments are unworthy of the wise; that magic may sometimes be used to good effect in medicine but that books of magic should be eschewed.¹⁶⁶

The great Dominican, the Doctor Universalis, Albertus Magnus (d. 1289) treats especially three questions: the possibility of enchantment (bewitchment); the removal of these enchantments by other magic arts and the effects of witchcraft.¹⁶⁷ The prudent scholastic inclines generally to the opinion that magic frequently rests upon deception, that the people are led entirely by their imperfect mental culture into an association of magic deeds with later occurrences. Yet he has no doubt that the art of be-

¹⁶⁵Gualtieri Alverni, Opera Omnia. Paris, 1674. 1, II, 983.

¹⁶⁶Epistola Fratris Rogeri Baconis de secretis operibus artis et naturae, et de nullitate magiae. London, 1859.

¹⁶⁷Alberti Magni, Compendium theologiae veritatis. Paris, 1890. 1. II, c. 27.

witchment exists; the Church Fathers have held that opinion and the Church has promulgated laws concerning it. "Nulli dubium esse debet, multos esse maleficiatos vi et potestate daemonum, quia hoc sancti patres dicunt, et ecclesia super hoc iura promulgavit, et hoc patet etiam omnibus illis, qui de negromantia et de factis imaginum aliquid noverunt."¹⁶⁸ According to Albertus, sorcerers are able to perform their wonders, only on account of a pact with the devil.¹⁶⁹ "Magi miracula faciunt per privatos contractus initia foederis cum daemonibus." Again, "Si enim per invocationes, coniurationes, sacrificia fiunt, tunc aperte pactum initur cum daemone, et tunc est apostasia oris ibi. Si autem non fit nisi opere simplici, tunc est apostasia operis, quia illud opus expectatur a daemone, et expectare aliquid a daemone . . . est fidei contumelia, et ideo apostasia."¹⁷⁰ Albertus did not believe in the reality of witch-rides, but says that the women who declare they journey at night with Herodias, are simply deluded by the devil.¹⁷¹

The great pupil of Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) in his *Commentary on the Sentences of Lombard*, declares that some persons said, there was no witchcraft except in the ideas of men, who imputed to witches, natural effects of which the causes were hidden. This is contrary to the teachings of the Church, which says that demons have power over the bodies and minds of men, when they are permitted by God, and so through this power, witches are able to do wonders. In the *Summa*, the author says that magicians work miracles (this word is not used in the absolute sense) through the demons, by means of a compact, tacit or expressed with them.¹⁷² In another place he declares that when a soul is

¹⁶⁸ Alb. Mag., De somno et vigilia II, c. 5.

¹⁶⁹ Alb. Mag. Compend., I, II, Dist. VII, c. 10.

¹⁷⁰ Id., c. 12.

¹⁷¹ Id., c. 31.

¹⁷² Thomae Aquinatis, Summa Theologica, I, qu. 110, art. 4; II da, II dae, qu. 92-96.

vehemently moved to wickedness, as occurs in little old women, the countenance becomes venomous and hurtful to children, (this is the power of fascination frequently attributed to witches). It is also possible that by God's permission, or in accordance with some secret agreement the spiteful demons cooperate in this, as the witches may have a compact with them.¹⁷³

Another Dominican, also a student and professor at Paris, Peter of Tarantaise, who in 1276 became Pope with the name Innocent V has left a *Commentary on the Sentences*. According to him it is false to say there is no reality in witchcraft. He also states that it is not lawful to make use of magic to rid oneself of some evil already produced by that power.¹⁷⁴ A contemporary of his, the learned Franciscan, Bonaventure (d. 1274) held the same views regarding the reality of witchcraft and the awful power of the devil over human beings.¹⁷⁵ These Commentaries of Aquinas, Peter of Tarantaise, and Bonaventure formed the real manual for theological instruction in the University of Paris and were referred to in all cases of doubt.

In the next century we find John Duns Scotus (d. 1308) taking up the same questions in his Commentary. His critical views regarding the Church's teaching on some points did not hinder him from handling the question of the magic arts in the traditional theological manner. He declares that without doubt, persons who had made a compact with the wicked spirits could practise witchcraft.¹⁷⁶ Scotus is of the opinion that the wicked spirits keep this bargain and aid man, not because of the agreement, but only because they wish to be honored and to say they will serve no one in the future, if the agree-

¹⁷³Op. cit., I, qu. 117, art. 3.

¹⁷⁴Innocentii V pont. max. ex ordine Praedicatorum assumpti, in IV Libros Sententiarum commentaria. lib IV, Dist. XXIV, art. 4.

¹⁷⁵Bonaventurae, Opera Omnia. Florence, 1885. II, dist. 7, para. II, cap. 6; IV, dist. 34, art. II, quest. 2.

¹⁷⁶Joannes Duns Scoti, Quaestiones in Petri Lombardi Libros Sent. lib. IV, dist. 34.

ment is broken. He also holds the view that the witchcraft works only so long as some concrete means, for instance, a bent needle or something similar, exists; if that is destroyed the devil is no longer bound by his compact.¹⁷⁷ This means should be sought for, if a person is thought to be bewitched, and destroyed; this is to be done especially if the witchcraft has not been annihilated by prayer and the sacramentals of the Church. Richard of Middleton (d. 1308) holds the same views. Following the Dominican teaching, William Durandus of St. Porciano (d. 1332) wrote his *Commentary on Lombard*. He adopts, with regard to faith and knowledge, a view contrary to that of St. Thomas Aquinas, but explains the questions raised by witchcraft in the customary way, according to the decretals.¹⁷⁸ Peter of Palude (d. 1342) also treated the pertinent question; he declares that when women practise witchcraft with such means as beans or the liver of a cock, it is not the virtue of these things that produces the evil results, but the hidden powers of the devil who deludes the witch by means of these corporal things.¹⁷⁹

About the middle of the fourteenth century, the Franciscan Peter of Aquila (d. 1361), inquisitor of Florence taught as did Duns Scotus, and at the same time showed that the evil practice of witchcraft was prevalent in Italy as well as in France, and England.¹⁸⁰ In Germany, Thomas of Strasburg, General of the Augustinians, followed the teaching of Aquinas. The contention of some persons that witchcraft was not a reality and that demons had no real existence, he dispatched quickly with the same proofs that his great predecessor had given. He also teaches that the exorcism of the Church is not always effective "deo permittente sepe visum est, quod exorcismi

¹⁷⁷Op. cit., I, II, dist. 7.

¹⁷⁸D. Durandi a Sancto Porciano, in Petri Lombardi. *Sententias Theologicas Commentariorum*, Libri 1111, Venice 1568. lib. 15, dist. XXXIV, quest. prima.

¹⁷⁹Hansen, op. cit., 167.

¹⁸⁰Petrus de Aquila, dictus Scotellus, *Super quatuor libros magistri Sententiarum*, lib. IV, dist. 34.

et coniurationes ecclesiae non valent semper ad tollendum corporales molestias illatas hominibus ab ipsis demonibus,"¹⁸¹ yet to wish to destroy the evil by means of magic was mortal sin.

John Gerson (d. 1429), Chancellor of the University of Paris, in a tract *De erroribus circa Artem Magicam* states clearly the teaching of his times. He declares that to call in question the existence and activity of demons is erroneous and contrary to Sacred Scripture, as well as destructive to human and political society. "They are to be corrected who assert that theologians attribute too much power to demons. Yet it is true that some attribute to the evil spirits, phenomena produced by natural causes for there are many marvels in nature."¹⁸² Again he says that the attempt to produce effects which cannot be reasonably expected from God or from natural causes, should be considered as superstition and suspect of a pact with the devil.¹⁸³ In answer to the question why God permits the devil to have such power over human beings, he gives four reasons: as a manifestation of His glory; or for the damnation of the obstinate; or the punishment of sinners; or to try the faithful.¹⁸⁴ Gerson asserts that the devil is worshiped by the prayers, sacrifices, and incense used in magic rites; these acts are the more sacrilegious, the holier the thing abused. Finally he says that witchcraft must not be employed to drive out witchcraft for this is a grave sin against faith.¹⁸⁵

Gerson includes in his tract a decision of the theological faculty of the University of Paris. In 1398 this faculty held a general congregation in the Church of St. Mathurin and adopted a series of twenty-eight articles,

¹⁸¹Thomas de Argentina, *Scripta super quattuor libros Sententiarum*, II, 1; IV, dist. 6.

¹⁸²Joannis Gersonii, *Opera Omnia*, Antwerp, 1706. Tom. I Pars. II, 201.

¹⁸³Id., 212.

¹⁸⁴Id., 213.

¹⁸⁵Id., 213.

which became a standard for demonologists and were regarded as an unanswerable argument against sceptics who questioned the reality of the wickedness of magic. The University declared that there was an implied pact with Satan in every superstitious observance; it condemned as erroneous the assertions that it was permissible by magic arts and witchcraft to invoke the aid of demons, to seek their friendship or to enter into compacts with them, to imprison them in stones, rings, mirrors, and images, to use sorcery to bring about good ends or for the cure of sorcery, that God could be induced by magic arts to compel demons to obey invocations, that the celebration of masses and other good work used in some forms of sorcery was permissible. On the one hand the University denied that images of lead, gold or wax when baptized and consecrated on certain days, possessed the powers ascribed to them in books of magic, on the other hand it was emphatic in remarking on the incredulity of those who denied that sorcery, incantations and the invocation of demons, possessed the powers claimed for them by sorcerers.¹⁸⁶

The so-called last scholastic, the German Gabriel Biel (d. 1484) a theological teacher in Tübingen, in his *Commentary on the Sentences* asserts that a witch through an express pact with the devil, can work out her evil designs. "Potest homini imaginationem turbare," etc. According to him it is false to say that there is no reality in witchcraft; "Falsa est opinio dicentium, maleficium nihil esse in rei veritate, sed solum in talium hominum existimatione, qui effectus quorum cause sunt occulte nonnunquam solent maleficiis demonum imputare."¹⁸⁷

The year 1486 saw the completion of a book, which, though it acquired no legislative force in the Church, became the source of untold mischief. This

¹⁸⁶Gersonii, op. cit., 218, 219.

¹⁸⁷Hansen, *Zauberwahn*, 164.

was the famous *Malleus Maleficarum*,¹⁸⁸ the work of two inquisitors, Henry Institor and James Sprenger, who published the book in order to break the resistance opposed to their official actions by some pastors; these latter had declared in their sermons that there were no witches with power to harm human beings. The *Malleus Maleficarum* is in three parts, the first two of which deal with the reality of witchcraft on the evidence of the Bible and of canon and civil law, explain its nature and the horrors connected with it, and detail the remedies to be used by the Church against it; the third part gives instructions to ecclesiastical and secular judges as to the manner in which witch-trials should be conducted and what sentence should be pronounced on offenders. The authors declare that witches must be more severely punished than heretics, because they, too, are apostates and because they not only deny the faith from fear of men, but over and above this, they pay homage to the devil and give themselves up to him body and soul. The enormity of their sin is greater than that of the wicked angels; the severity of their punishment must correspond to the magnitude of their offense. The *Malleus* differs from the earlier witch-literature in three important points, first, the *Malleus* makes the *maleficium* or the injury and not the heretical incident of the Sabbat, the central point; second, it has a distinct aversion for the female sex; third, it insists on the maleficent side of witchcraft and is inclined to delegate witch-trials to the secular law-courts. After the religious upheaval of the sixteenth century this book became an undisputed authority for Protestant as well as Catholic districts.

Two years after the publication of the *Malleus*, Ulrich Molitor, doctor of Roman and Canon law, at the demand of Archduke Sigismund of the Tyrol, published a memo-

¹⁸⁸The use of the word *Maleficarum* instead of *Maleficorum* is significant as showing the limiting of the evil power to the female sex. The *Malleus Maleficarum*, written in 1486, was published in 1487; the earliest editions bear no place of publication.

randum on witchcraft, *De laniis et phitonicis (sic) mulieribus, teutonice unholden vel hexen* which contains many sensible opinions. He says that no weight should be attached to statements made under torture, for through pain and fear anyone might be made to confess all sorts of things he had never done. According to Molitor, human beings cannot assume other shapes and fly to distant places, this is pure imagination, neither can witches travel many miles at night, it is their lively imaginations, which are filled with images conjured up by the devil, and thus they deceive themselves into thinking that what was only fancy, happened in reality. On the other hand, Molitor believes in the existence of witches and in the possibility of a pact between them and the devil, which action ought to be severely punished. Although such accursed women can do nothing of themselves, yet because they have fallen away from a most generous God and dedicated themselves to the devil, they should, according to civil and divine law, be put to death. "Tales sceleratae mulieres, que a deo largissimo apostatarunt et dyabolo sese dedicarent morte plecti debent."¹⁸⁹

Thomas Cajetan, Dominican General, in 1500 wrote a tract *De maleficiis*, in which he discusses the question whether it is lawful to make use of magic or witchcraft to counteract magic, and answers in the negative.¹⁹⁰

Strange contradictions on the subject of witchcraft are found in the writings of the celebrated Strasburg preacher and theological teacher, Geiler von Kaisersberg, who wrote his *Emeis*, a collection of sermons in 1508. The following extract is taken from Hansen, "You ask me what I have to say concerning women who travel at night and assemble together? You ask if they travel to Dame Venusberg and if the witches really go back and forth, or

¹⁸⁹Hansen, *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter*, Bonn, 1901, 244 seqq.

¹⁹⁰Hansen, *op. cit.*, 254, 255.

whether they are only dreaming, or whether they are ghosts and what I think about it all? I answer you as follows. To the first question I say they travel here and there and yet remain in one place, that is, they imagine they are travelling, for the devil can create fancies in their brain, so that they think they are travelling and that they are with other women and are dancing and banqueting together. And Satan can do this best with those who are pledged to him." (Here Geiler gives an example of a woman who sought to convince a preacher that she travelled about at night. She anointed herself with an unguent, uttered a spell and fell asleep, dreaming she was travelling, though she never moved from her place beside the preacher. When she awoke, she declared she had travelled to the Sabbath. Again, the author assumes the reality of witch-rides, "If a witch sits on a pitchfork which she has rubbed with salve and speaks the prescribed words, she can ride about wherever she will. It is not any virtue in the fork or in the salve that does it, therefore, it is the devil who does it, who carries her away on the fork, when he sees his signs used by the witch."¹⁹¹ Geiler also believed that witches with the devil's aid could produce storms, could draw milk from an axe-handle, could substitute changelings for children, etc.¹⁹² "The devil has made a compact with witches and has given them words and signs; when they use these signs and words, he does whatever they ask and so the devil acts through their will." But this does not make a witch any the less deserving of death, according to the divine law "die soll man toten." The fact that more women than men were given to witchcraft, Geiler, like the authors of the *Malleus*, attributes to the nature of women; women are more credulous than men, therefore, the more easily persuaded by the devil; they have greater powers

¹⁹¹Nun fragestu, was sagstu uns aber von den weibern, die zu nacht faren und so si zusammen kumen? etc.

¹⁹²Hansen, op. cit., 290.

of imagination and lastly "they are loquacious. What a woman knows must come out, it will not stay in. Hence, when the devil instructs women, they give this instruction to other women, and so on, and thus he wins numberless souls."¹⁹³

In 1505 appeared the *Question de le strie* or *Questio lamiarum* of Samuel de Cassinis of Milan, which deals principally with the power of the devil over human beings, with the night-flights of the lamiae or witches and with their attendance at the Sabbat. The author contends that while the devil has great power, he cannot carry people from one place to another. He argues that to perform such an act would require a miracle; that God alone works miracles; that if the devil could so transport persons to the Sabbat, it could be done only by the permission of God, Who in such a case would appear to favor sin since the Sabbat is sinful. He likewise refutes all opposing arguments and proves conclusively that there is no truth in the stories of transportations by the devil.¹⁹⁴

The next year Vincenz Dodo of Pavia wrote his *Apologia* against the *Questio* of Cassinis. In this pamphlet Dodo proves at least to his own satisfaction several statements denied by his adversary. Among them are the following: a devil or an angel is able to assume a natural body; the devil by the permission of God can do much evil (this permission of God is negative); the devil is able to transport persons from one place to another, therefore, he carries the witches to the Sabbat; the devil frequently deceives the witches into believing that they have been actually present at the Sabbat when such is only a delusion.¹⁹⁵

The Dominican inquisitor, Bernard of Como, in his *Tractatus de Strigiis*, written in 1508, asserts the reality of the night-rides, the Sabbats, the bewitching of

¹⁹³Hansen, op. cit., 290.

¹⁹⁴Id., 262-273.

¹⁹⁵Id., 276.

children, and shows how these witches fall under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition. He says that many persons, especially women, meet at certain places at specified times and that the devil appears before them in human form; these women deny the faith, their baptism, also God and the Blessed Virgin. After they have trampled on a cross, they take the devil as their master, promising to obey him in all things.¹⁹⁶ Bernard then cites examples of such gatherings in the diocese of Como and the neighboring places and says that even children are taken to these meetings where they learn to deny the Catholic faith. This belief in the reality of the Sabbats and night-rides is not contrary to the recommendation of the Canon Episcopi, according to this inquisitor, because the Canon spoke only of the witches of the first nine centuries and the witches of the present day are a different sect. Bernard does not believe, however, that men can really be changed into animals. The detection and punishment of witches belongs to the Inquisition, which alone can deal with them as is befitting their crime.¹⁹⁷

The learned Benedictine abbot, John Trithemius, who combated so many superstitions, shared fully in the belief of his age concerning witches. In 1508 he wrote his answer to eight theological questions proposed by the emperor, Maximilian, *Joannis Trithemii liber octo quaestionum ad Maximilianum Caesarem*. The fifth, sixth and seventh questions deal with magic and witchcraft. 5) De reprobis atque maleficis; 6) De potestate maleficarum; 7) De permissione divina.¹⁹⁸ The abbot declares that many persons have an express or tacit compact with the devil; that some women pay homage to him and receive his aid in their wicked deeds.¹⁹⁹ Witches are not to be tolerated but, on the contrary, are to be exterminated,

¹⁹⁶Tractatus Eiusdem R. P. F., Bernardi Comensis, De Strigiis, Rome, 1584, 1, 2, 3, 4.

¹⁹⁷Id., 9, 10, 12.

¹⁹⁸Hansen, Quellen, 292; Zauberwahn, 516; Riezler, Geschichte der Hexenprozesse in Bayern. Stuttgart, 1896, 122.

¹⁹⁹Hansen, Quellen, 292.

according to the command of God (Exod. XXII, 18; Deut. XVIII, 10-12) "Wizards thou shalt not suffer to live." With regard to the deeds of witches, Trithemius gives the traditional list—producing tempests, devastating fields, injuring men and beasts. "Maleficiae quodam professionis genere subiiciuntur daemonibus, quorum ministerio aerem turbant, tempestates suscitant, fruges devastant, homines et iumenta infirmant. Agunt cum daemonibus spurcissimae voluptatis foeda commertia et eos perniciosius carminibus quos voluerint ab inferis revocant in aspectum. Harum facta non miracula sed potius maleficia dicenda sunt, et extremo supplicio merito punienda."²⁰⁰ In answer to the sixth and seventh questions, Trithemius states that the devil exercises his power by the permission of God.

A second work of this scholar dates from the same year and is a pamphlet, *Antipalus maleficiorum* written by command of the Elector Joachim I of Brandenburg. Four kinds of witches are distinguished by the author: those who, without any league with the devil, prepare injurious and deadly drinks from herbs and roots; those who practice their magic arts by means of formulas forbidden by the Church; those who have open relations with the demons and by their aid "aerem turbant, fulgura suscitant, vertiginem capitibus immittunt, visum oculis auferunt."²⁰¹ The fourth and most dangerous class is composed of those who abjure the Christian faith and sell themselves to the devil; these are able to produce all diseases "morbum caducum, epilepsiam, pestem et febrem in hominibus excitant, dementiam et insaniam nescientibus procurant."²⁰² According to the abbot, these witches are very numerous in every province and there are few inquisitors and almost no judges to avenge the sin against God and nature. Men and cattle die through the perfidy of these women and no one

²⁰⁰Hansen, op. cit., 294.

²⁰¹Ibid.

²⁰²Ibid.

thinks it happens by means of witchcraft. Many suffer the worst diseases and do not know they are bewitched.²⁰³ These witches should be most severely punished, "ultimo ignis supplicio jure punienda."²⁰⁴ No one, however, could be ruled by the devil and misled into witchcraft except of his free will, and every Christian possessed in the Sacraments and prayers of the Church a sure means against all the arts of witches.

The *Layenspiegel* of Ulrich Tengler, a jurist of Hochstadt, took up the question from the lawyer's viewpoint, though the book shows that the author was thoroughly conversant with the teaching of theologians. Tengler says there is great diversity of opinion among jurists concerning the deeds of witches, their ability to produce storms, to afflict men and beasts, to ride at night, etc., because it is difficult for the mind to comprehend these things.²⁰⁵ Much of the book is based on the *Malleus Maleficarum*, especially the pages treating of the investigation and punishment of witches.²⁰⁶

A Dominican inquisitor, Jacob von Hoogstraten, in 1510 wrote a pamphlet, *Quam graviter peccent quærentes auxilium a maleficis*, which he devotes to a discussion of this theme only, and does not mention the witches of his time.²⁰⁷

Martin of Arles, professor of theology and canon law in Pampeluna, in 1515 wrote his *Tractatus de superstitionibus contra maleficia seu sortilegia, quæ hodie vigent in orbe terrarum*, which deals with all the common superstitions. The author holds that the witch-flights are merely illusions, produced by the devil in the minds of women who have sworn allegiance to him; that witches by the help of the devil can destroy fields and fruits and harm men; and finally that such persons are cut off from the Catholic faith and should be severely punished.

²⁰³Hansen, op. cit., 295.

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵Riezler, op. cit., 132.

²⁰⁶*Malleus Maleficarum*, p. III, q. 17.

²⁰⁷Hansen, *Quellen*, 306.

CHAPTER VI

ECCLESIASTICAL WRITERS, 1200-1700

(Continued)

Among Italian theologians treating this subject we find two names of great weight, Silvester Prierias and Bartholomew de Spina, members of the Dominican Order. The first of these, Prierias, was at one time Master of the Sacred Palace and inquisitor in northern Italy, on which account his work is of great interest. His book, *De Strigimagarum Daemonumque Mirandis, libri tres*, was finished in 1521. It is divided into three parts, the first two of which deal with the theoretical aspects of witchcraft and sorcery, while the third contains instructions for the conduct of witch-trials. The learned Dominican holds to the reality of witchcraft and the existence of witches, "Quod vero et magi et mage sine numero sint, testes sunt populi, qui gregatum horum maleficia patiuntur."²⁰⁸ These witches have a compact with the devil by whose aid they work their evil spells. The writer believes also in the reality of witch-flights and the Sabbats and proves his assertion by examples in his own country. He devotes part of Book II to the denial of the similarity between the witches spoken of in the Canon Episcopi and those of his own time, for the Canon Episcopi had forbidden belief in witches and Prierias undertakes to show that one can be a good Catholic and yet recognize the possibility of witches and their magic arts. The third part of his treatise takes up the question of the probable heresy in witchcraft and gives instructions concerning the trial and punishment of those accused of the black art. "Unde si crimen fatentur et volunt redire, abiurata heresi ad penitentiam admittuntur."²⁰⁹ "Si autem crimen

²⁰⁸Prierias, *De Strigimagarum Daemonumque Mirandis, Libri Tres*. Rome, 1575. Lib. II, c. 2, 140.

²⁰⁹*Id.*, II, c. 3, 145.

non fatetur postquam est convictus nec consentit abiurare, est ut hereticus impenitens condemnandus.²¹⁰ . . .

"Quanto magis circa heresim strigimagarum ubi semper concurrit aut evidens factum in pueris hominibus vel iumentis aut indicium facti, puta per instrumenta reperta."²¹¹

Bartholomew de Spina (d. 1546), a pupil of Prierias, teacher of theology at the universities of Bologna and Padua, and Provincial of the Dominican Order in the Holy Land, wrote three books dealing with the question of witchcraft; *Questio de strigibus et lamiis*, 1523, *Tractatus de praeeminentia sacrae theologiae super alias omnes scientias et praecipue humanarum legum*, 1525; *Apologeticae tres de lamiis adversus Joannem Franciscum Pontinibium iurisperitum*, 1525. The *Questio* treats of the witch-delusion in all its phases; it attempts to refute all arguments against the truth of the practice and fully treats the stereotyped question of witch-rides, incubi and succubi, Sabbats, etc. Unlike some of the teachers of the time, Spina seems to believe in the reality of witch-rides; in chapter five he says that people can be carried by demons over great distances and the sacred writings do not contradict this fact but seem to strengthen it. According to him the changing of men or women into animals is only a delusion²¹² which, like many other acts attributed to witches, takes place only in sleep. In chapter nineteen he gives modern examples of the apparent change of witches into cats but treats this as a delusion produced by the evil spirit. Other chapters are devoted to an explanation of the Canon Episcopi, of the various powers attributed to witches, and finally of the divine permission which allows such evils to exist for the sanctification of the good.

²¹⁰Prierias, op. cit., lib., III, c. 4, 243.

²¹¹Ibid.

²¹²Hansen, Quellen, 329.

The *Tractatus de praeeminentia sacrae theologiae* says that in regard to this cult of witchcraft, its possibility or its actuality, whether it is to be regarded as heresy or not, theology alone can decide what is to be taught and what course of action is to be followed in dealing with witches.²¹³ In the *Apologia*, Spina refutes the various arguments of the jurist, Francis Ponzinibius, whose *De lamiis* treats the witches' flights and Sabbats as illusions and justifies his own position regarding the principal assertions concerning witchcraft.

Paulus de Grillandus Castilioneus, auditor of criminal cases in the diocese of Arezzo, in 1525, wrote a pamphlet concerning heretics and sorcerers. He says that the question whether witches are transported bodily or in imagination only, by the demon, is one of great importance which occupies the attention of many writers. Doctors of laws for the greater part hold that witches are not bodily carried by the devil, but such people are deluded by the evil spirit, according to the Canon Episcopi. Theologians hold the contrary, that the devil is able to transport persons through the air, and consequently these witches are so carried to the Sabbats. Grillandus then discusses the opinions of those who believe in the reality of witch-flights and cites an example to show that though women believe they really travel at night to the meeting-places of witches, in reality they do not move from the place in which they are. Nevertheless many eminent men hold the contrary opinion, among them St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas and Prierias.²¹⁴

²¹³Hansen, op. cit., 334. "cum ergo articulus hic de secta strigum an inquam detur de facto an de possibili, an haeresim sapiant vel non sapiant manifeste quae de tali secta narrantur, ad solam spectet theologiam, neque eum possunt ista cognosci nisi ipsa docente neque de talibus in iure quoquo modo tractatur, nisi quatenus ex illius fonte assumpta eidem theologiae iure subserviunt.

²¹⁴Hansen, Quellen, 340.

In 1540 Arnaldus Albertini, Inquisitor in Valencia and Sicily and later bishop of Patti, wrote a book entitled *De Agnoscendis assertionibus catholicis et haereticis*, two chapters of which he devotes to the question of the reality of witch-flights and the punishment of penitent witches by the Inquisition. He brings forward many statements in proof of the witch-rides, viz: the power of the devil over human beings, the desire of certain women to pay allegiance to demons, known examples of such flights, etc., and ends with the assertion that it is not heretical to hold the opinion that women can be carried through the air, because of a pact between them and the devil.²¹⁵ According to the writer this transportation cannot be denied, because if the devil carried Christ and placed Him upon the pinnacle of the temple, much more easily can he carry these women.²¹⁶

With regard to the punishment of witches, Albertini declares that though guilty of heresy, they should, if repentant, be admitted to reconciliation with the Church. "When the bishop or the apostolic inquisitor learns of the crime of heresy or of the black art, if the accused confess that he has committed murder or any other grave crime on account of which he deserves the extreme punishment of civil law, he neither ought nor can he hand him over to the secular arm on account of such accusation, in such wise that the judge condemn him to death as one accused of heresy, but he ought, if the accused is sincerely desirous of returning to the bosom of the Church, admit him to

²¹⁵"Quod non est haereticum asserere, mulieres de quibus agimus, portari per diversa terrarum spacia de die vel de nocte ex pacto inter eas et daemonum inito, et intrare domos de nocte et ibi suffocare infantes. . . . Magister Sylvester in sua Summa, in verbo haereticus 3. concludens, has strigas aliquando portari corporaliter a daemone per diversa loca, et hoc non est impossibile, nec est haereticum sic asserere, aliquando haec eis contingere mentaliter et imaginarie." Hansen, 348.

²¹⁶Hansen, op. cit., 351.

reconciliation, absolution and freedom from censure of excommunication, after he has abjured his heresy.²¹⁷

In Spain, also, several writers devoted part of the works to the engrossing subject, among them, Pedro Ciruelo, professor in the University of Alcalà, who published his *Opus de magica supersticione* in 1521 and in 1539 his *Reprovacion de las supersticiones y hechizerias, libro muy utile y necessario a todos los buenos christianos*.²¹⁸ Ciruelo holds that though witches exist and work evil by means of a pact with the devil, yet the witch-rides are only illusions caused by the evil one. Nevertheless the devil teaches these witches many secrets of nature and they can perform marvels to the great astonishment of the simple. Yet these arts are against the teaching of the Scripture, of the Fathers, and of holy Church. Anyone who makes use of the black art is an apostate and a traitor.²¹⁹

In 1540 Alphons a Castro, professor of theology at Salamanca, devoted part of his work to the questions of heresy and witchcraft, *De impia sortilegarum, maleficarum et lamiarum haeresi earumque punitioe*. He believes in the reality of witch-flights and gives examples of such, which have taken place in various parts of Spain. He speaks of the crimes committed by witches, such as adoration of demons, attendance at the Sabbat, killing of children, etc., and declares that all witches are heretics and apostates and should be punished as such. He says that women are more proficient in the diabolical arts than

²¹⁷Hansen, 353. "Quod episcopus seu inquisitor apostolicus cognoscens de crimine haeresis seu artis maleficae contra reum illius criminis, si reus ipse confiteatur crimen homicidii ab eo commissi seu aliud crimen gravissimum, quo quibus secundum leges civiles deberet ultimo supplicio damnari, non debet ob hoc crimen talem reum nec potest de iure tradere illum iudici saeculari taliter, ut iudex secularis illum morte condemnet, sicut condemnat iudex sibi traditum ob crimen haeresis, sed debet illum reum volentem puro corde et non ficto redire ad gremium ecclesiae admittere ad reconciliationem, beneficio absolutionis ab excommunicatione sibi impenso, abiurata primitus haeresi."

²¹⁸According to Hansen, this title is the Spanish translation of the old Latin title.

²¹⁹Hansen, Quellen, 324. "El tal christiano es apostat y traydor contra la yglesia catholica."

men, because of their strong imaginations, and because they are easily deluded. Because witches commit such crimes by means of their magic, they should be sought out and punished for them. "These wicked people, whether men or women, who use this diabolical art, should be punished as heretics. But if besides these matters which regard faith, they commit other crimes, on account of which they can be condemned without the sentence of an ecclesiastical judge, the secular power alone can take them into custody and punish them with capital punishment. For, as we said above, they kill children at night, or they cause illness and weak health and commit other similar crimes which deserve the penalty of death even though there is no evidence of unbelief or apostasy."²²⁰

A third Spanish writer was the Dominican Francis de Victoria, professor of theology at Salamanca, who discusses the question of magic arts in one part of his work, *Relectiones 12 theologicae*, 1540. He gives credit to the stories of the ancient witches, Circe, Hecate, etc., and says that not all the deeds of magicians are false, this is proved from the Scriptures.²²¹ Of the reality of witch-flight he has no doubt, "daemones et magi virtute daemonum possunt movere et transferre corpora de loco ad locum." Again, "nulla ratione potest negari quin daemones possint movere localiter corpora."²²²

About 1570 the renowned jurist of the Roman Curia, the Spanish Francis Pegna, in his four commentaries, expressed as the common opinion of theologians, that witches flew through the air to their nightly orgies, that this was "verissima, multis quidem rationibus et eviden-

²²⁰Hansen, 344. "Sed praeter haec, quae ad fidem spectant, quaedam alia flagitia committunt, propter quae absque iudicis ecclesiastici sententia, qui illos de haeresi damnaret, sola saecularis potestas potest illos capere et ultimo supplicio punire. Nam . . . pueros noctu occidunt, aut aegros et valetudinarios efficiunt et alia similia committunt, propter quae digni sunt morte, etiamsi de illorum infidelitate aut apostasia non constaret."

²²¹Id., 355.

²²²Id., 356.

tibus signis atque experimentis comprobata."²²³ He also followed the scholastic teaching as to the reality of incubi and succubi but held that the changing of witches into animals was only an illusion.²²⁴

As Germany was the principal center of witchcraft it is not surprising that it produced a number of writers on that subject, especially is this true of the latter part of the sixteenth century. In 1589, Peter Binsfeld, auxiliary bishop at Treves, published his work, *Tractatus de confessionibus maleficorum et sagarum, an et quanta fides iis adhibenda sit* which is in direct contradiction to the humane work of the Protestant Weyer, and which also largely fostered the witch-persecution. In the introduction, Binsfeld says that there are different opinions concerning the nature of witches and witch-trials; some think all such things are illusions, other declare they are impossible, as for himself, he rejects the assertion of Bodin²²⁵ that people through the help of the devil can change themselves into animals, but he holds that many deeds, ascribed to witches are true. The use of trial by water he considers a work of the devil; he declares it godless to refuse the Sacraments to those who are penitent; only the stubborn ones are to be burned alive, the others are to be executed before burning. Yet he believes in intercourse with the devil and in the reality of witch-rides, in support of which assertion, he appeals not only to theologians and lawyers, but also "to most certain and undoubted experience, confirmed by the general voice of the people and we may well say that the voice of the people is the voice of God, since all truth is of God," "atque his certe dicere possumus, vox populi vox Dei, cum omnis veritas a Deo sit."²²⁶ On account of the gravity of

²²³Directorium Inquisitorum F. Nicolai Eymerici, Ordinis Praedicatorum Cum Commentariis Francisci Peniae, Venice, 1595. Quaest., XLIII; Comment., XLIII, 343.

²²⁴Francisci Pegnae Annotationes in Tractatum de Strigiis Bernardi Comensis. Rome, 1584, 156.

²²⁵Bodin, Démonomaie des Sorciers, Cologne, 1593, lib., I, 6.

²²⁶Janssen, op. cit., VIII, 655 seqq.

the sin of witchcraft, Binsfeld maintains that in witch-trials it is justifiable to overstep the regular laws and ordinances regarding torture and punishment. "Regulare et iuridicum est, quod, propter enormitatem et immanitatem criminis, iura et statuta transgredi licet."²²⁷

Very distressing results proceeded from his doctrine that, on the ground of the statements of witches concerning their accomplices, the authorities had a right to subject the persons indicated to torture; there being no doubt, as a rule, of the truth of such statements.²²⁸

At the same time, there lived at Treves, the Dutch cleric Cornelius Kallidius Loos, who had been driven out of his native land by the Protestants. Out of pity for the victims of the witchcraft persecution, who were tortured and burned, he wrote a pamphlet, *De vera et falsa magia* and sent it to the press without having submitted it for ecclesiastical approbation. The manuscript was seized when only a few sheets had been printed, Loos was confined in an abbey and in 1592 summoned before the ecclesiastical court presided over by Binsfeld who ordered him to make a retractation in word and writing. Loos had asserted that the whole system of witchcraft was a creation of the imagination, that there were no persons who had abjured God and who worshiped the devil. He was obliged to retract this statement, as well as the fundamental principle of his pamphlet "that all that was written about corporeal flights of witches was nothing but illusion, superstition and invention."²²⁹ Loos' attempt to put an end to the witch-epidemic was of no practical use; far more numerous than his followers were those who, like Binsfeld, defended the witch-superstition, encouraged persecution and urged rulers and people to continue it.

²²⁷Ibid.

²²⁸Duhr, *Die Stellung der Jesuiten in den deutschen Hexenprozessen*, Cologne, 1900, points out that Binsfeld in this respect was at variance with the practice of the Inquisition, p. 30.

²²⁹Soldan-Heppe, *op. cit.*, II, 22-24; Riezler, *op. cit.*, 245.

In 1596 Franz Agricola, pastor of Sittard in the duchy of Julich, deemed it necessary to enlighten rulers and magistrates on the sin of witchcraft and its punishment. Accordingly he wrote a pamphlet, *Von Zauberer, Zauberinnen, und Hexen* in the preface of which he states that "the most scandalous, abominable, and dangerous sin of witchcraft has spread in all directions, no country, town, village or district, no class of society is free from it."²³⁰ He maintains the reality of all the arts of witches, their journeyings, their intercourse with the devil, and shows the necessity of their being punished. He says that sorceresses, or witches, are more wicked than heathen or idolatrous people, than blasphemers and perjurers, etc. He advises that care should be taken not to punish the innocent, rejects trial by water as superstitious, and speaks at length of the means which should be used to bring witches to penitence and reform. The most remarkable part of the work is the seventh, in which Agricola brings forward fifty-one arguments against the reality of sorcery and all the arts of the witches, not one of which, however, he will admit. He urges on subjects that if rulers are negligent in their punishment of witches, they themselves should take the matter in hand, spare no expense for rooting out the "accursed confederates of the devil" and that they should earnestly keep the magistrates to their duty in this respect.²³¹

Another scholar who treated the subject of witchcraft with the greatest diligence and acumen, was the lawyer Nicholas Remigius, privy councillor and chief judge in the duchy of Lorraine. In his book, *Daemonolatreia*, printed in 1596, he uses the confessions of some 800 witches who, during his term of office had, within sixteen years, been condemned to the stake.²³² These women confessed that they received from the devil, power to assume

²³⁰Janssen, op. cit., VIII, 656-659.

²³¹Id., VIII, 658.

²³²Remigius, *Daemonolatreia libri tres*, Lyons, 1595, lib. I, cap. 15.

the shape of small animals and so get into houses at night, when they took their human form and poisoned the sleeping household, or did other dreadful deeds. At the trial of witches, Remigius says, everything connected with them is suspicious, whether they go often to church or never, whether their bodies are cold or hot, and in every case unrelenting punishment is decreed against them. Remigius has not the slightest doubt that many children take part in the witch-gatherings. "When the devil has once obtained entrance into a family, he does not easily let himself be driven out again. He works upon the mothers to such an extent that they dedicate their children to him, take them to witch-dances at the age of seven or twelve, and initiate them in all the arts of witchcraft." These children should be punished and Remigius says that he had such children whipped while their parents were burned at the stake. He adds, "They should be completely exterminated so that no one would receive any further injury from them. Wholesome zeal is always preferable to outward semblance of mercifulness."²³³

The excitement due to witch-persecution reached its highest pitch between 1570 and 1640, during which time the human mind seemed to have become unbalanced. Diseases, fire, storms, famine, wars, great wealth, disappointment in love, remarkable beauty or ugliness, great knowledge, were all ascribed to the influence of the devil.²³⁴ No rank was secure against accusation; priests, religious, civil authorities, the wealthy, the poor, even children were denounced and executed. During this violent period of persecution for witchcraft, the Jesuits, especially in Germany, exerted a powerful influence as professors and writers of philosophy, dogmatic and moral theology, and as confessors and preachers;²³⁵ hence any work on this subject of the black art, would be incomplete without

²³³Remigius, *op. cit.*, lib., II, cap. c.

²³⁴Schwickerath, *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, XXVII, 476.

²³⁵*Ibid.*

some reference to their labors. It must be noted that the Society of Jesus, as such, never adopted an attitude of any sort towards the witch-trials, in spite of opinions to the contrary. Fr. Duhr, in his *Die Stellung der Jesuiten*, says, "The generals of the Society, at a distance from the scene of the witch-burnings, received the most contradictory reports about them, and of the cruelty practised by both laity and clergy against witches, and they found it difficult to form an opinion as to whether there was really question of such grave injustice as they were led to suppose existed. Had they found such to be the case it would have been their duty to send instructions to Germany. They contented themselves, however, with maintaining a neutral position, at the same time enjoining on their subjects to abstain from interference in the trials, whether against, or on behalf of, the witches. As regards individual Jesuits, we find in this respect, the greatest diversity of opinions. Some were convinced of the injustice of the proceedings, others saw in the number of condemnations a proof of the frightful spread of witchcraft and believed they should raise their voice in behalf of the rooting out of this great evil. Hence writer was opposed to writer, preacher to preacher."⁷²³⁶ Father Schwickerath asks, "Can it be reasonably expected that the Jesuits were so far ahead of their time, so enlightened that none of them should have shared the all-prevailing superstition? The Jesuits were children of their age, and like others, acted accordingly. Indeed, there were Jesuits who advocated severe measures against the witches; but on the other hand we find among them noble champions of the innocent victims."⁷²³⁷

One of the most important Jesuits was Gregory of Valentia, a Spaniard, professor of theology at Ingolstadt, who, in 1595, wrote his *Commentariorum Theologicorum Tomi Quattuor*, which gave him the name of one of the

⁷²³⁶Duhr, op. cit., 96.

⁷²³⁷Am. Cath. Quart., XXVII, 478.

greatest theologians of the sixteenth century. He treats witchcraft in the third volume of his work.²³⁸ The introduction declares that magistrates are strictly obliged to examine and punish witchcraft, this he endeavors to prove from the Scriptures. He then takes up several points in detail, such as those regarding the conduct of the judicial inquiry, the signs that suffice for imprisoning and torturing a person, the nature of the proceeding, etc. Valentia gives in great detail the signs by which a witch may be recognized; these are, 1) from her own confession, if she admits the performance of acts pertaining to witchcraft; 2) from the confessions of those guilty of the same crimes; 3) from the possession of a compact which gives the soul to the devil, after renouncing Christ; or from the impression of a certain mark (stigma) which is usually conferred on witches; 4) from the possession of sacred Hosts, certain poisons, toads, human limbs, wax figures pierced with needles; 5) from having been convicted of habitually invoking the devil; from having threatened evil to another; 6) from the testimony of witnesses who saw the accused besmear animals, which afterwards died, with poison or a salve; for having done the same to children or others.²³⁹ A prudent and diligent judge can add other signs, especially from former witch-trials and from the *Malleus Maleficarum*. According to the author, witches can be lawfully tortured by the Inquisition, because the crime of witchcraft is so difficult to prove.²⁴⁰ When imprisoned, witches should be allowed to receive spiritual aid, and be reconciled to God, but after the death sentence is pronounced, no denial on the part of the condemned is to be accepted.²⁴¹

Another Spanish Jesuit, Martin Delrio, a jurist and professor of philosophy and theology, in 1599 published

²³⁸Gregorii de Valentia, *Commentariorum Theologicorum Tomus Tertius*, Ingolstadt, 1603. Disp., VI; Quaest., XIII; Punct., 4.

²³⁹Op. cit., Disp. VI; Quaest., XIII, 944.

²⁴⁰Ibid.

²⁴¹Ibid.

his *Disquisitionum Magicarum libri sex* in which are found important regulations for the use of the rack, as well as a complete treatment of witchcraft, with numerous references to contemporary law-books and judicial practices. Delrio shared the witch-superstition of his time; belief in the reality of witch-rides, of incubi and succubi, of children born of the devil, etc. In his opinion, the actual basis of all witchcraft is the compact with the devil and he maintains that the witches, even though they injure no one, should be punished because of this compact. He, however, labored zealously for the mitigation of the cruelty of the witch-trials and endeavored to impress the judges with the principle that it was better for a hundred guilty persons to escape than for one innocent to be condemned.²⁴² If the judge can draw out the truth without recourse to torture, he should do so, for trial by torture is dangerous and deceptive and is often the cause of an innocent person suffering the severest punishment, "questio enim res fragilis est et periculosa et quae saepe veritatem fallit, saepe fit, ut innocens pro incerto scelere certissimas luat poenas."²⁴³ Delrio also forbids the use of torture beyond one hour. Yet all these circumstances did not prevent the book from being the source of great evil, as appears from hundreds of trials in which Delrio is referred to as the recognized authority who declares legitimate the harsh measures against witches.

Gregory of Valentia and Delrio were opposed by the most distinguished Jesuit theologian of the age in Germany, Adam Tanner, who in 1626 published his great work, *Universa theologica scholastica, speculativa, practica ad methodum sancti Thomae*, certain portions of which he devoted to the witch-question. He regards the witch-flights as dreams and self-deception on the part of women and as the result of demoniacal delusion, even though the witches should declare they had been carried

²⁴²Delrio, op. cit., lib. V, sec. 1.

²⁴³Id., sec. 9.

away by the evil spirit.²⁴⁴ Even if the women declare they had been carried away by Satan in the shape of a cat or mouse or some other animal they are not to be believed, for no spirit has power to change a human body into the shape of an animal. The demons, of themselves, without the permission of God have no power to injure others through the instrumentality of witches, unless the persons make use of salves which are naturally injurious to human beings. Tanner demands a remodelling of the judicial procedure against witches and declares that a witch should be allowed to have counsel to defend her and that no confession obtained by means of torture should be accepted; further, he demands that the most intelligent judges should be employed and that whenever possible, they should be assisted by a good theologian. He asks that penitent witches should not be burned, but receive ecclesiastical penances, like those imposed in the early Church. Above all, witchcraft is to be combatted by spiritual means, by prayer, good education of children, invocation of the saints and attendance at Mass.²⁴⁵

Tanner's salutary influence is noticed in the work of another German Jesuit, Paul Layman, who published his *Theologia moralis* in 1625. In this book, he devotes special attention to the witch-question, particularly to trials and the use of torture; while he does not deny witchcraft nor absolutely condemn the trials, yet he says much to prevent judicial murders. He declares that the existence of the crime of witchcraft is very difficult to establish, for the persons concerned are mostly "wavering, hysterical, often crazy women, who from their own confession might be deluded by the evil spirit."²⁴⁶ Recourse should not be had to the rack until the accused have been allowed to defend themselves; confessions obtained by torture should not be acted on, for they (the witches) are much fright-

²⁴⁴Diefenbach, *Der Hexenwahn vor und nach der Glaubensspaltung in Deutschland*, Mainz, 1886, 276.

²⁴⁵Duhr, *op. cit.*, 45-47; 53.

²⁴⁶Laymann, *Theologia Moralis*. Bamberg, 1669, 430.

ened and almost despairing, so that they are inclined to confess a crime which they have not committed, in order to escape by death the ignominy into which they have fallen.²⁴⁷

Like his master, Tanner, Frederic von Spee adopted the same attitude of leniency and became one of the greatest champions of humanity and justice in witch-trials. In 1627 Spee became confessor to those accused of witchcraft in Paderborn and after he had attended to their death, 200 witches, 90 per cent. of whom he declared to be innocent, he wrote his famous book, *Cautio Criminalis*, in 1631.²⁴⁸

The *Cautio* contains fifty-one Dubia or questions which the author answers by referring frequently to Tanner's opinions and very often argues against Binsfeld and Delrio. He asserts his belief in the reality of witchcraft which he considers a most atrocious crime, to be justly punished; torture, however, should not be extreme and the accused should be given the right to appeal from the torture.²⁴⁹ If the judge should extort a confession by means of the rack, such confession should be considered null.²⁵⁰ Spee says that torture fills the land with witches, because the torments are so frightful that many confess crimes they have not committed; women especially are prone to accuse themselves falsely.²⁵¹ Persons who, under torture confess falsely, are not guilty of mortal sin.²⁵² According to the author, witch-marks are not to be taken as a sign of guilt, "I did not see any and do not believe in them and I deplore the shameful credulity of so many distinguished men in this regard."²⁵³ This work of Spee

²⁴⁷Layman, op cit., 430.

²⁴⁸This book was at first published anonymously, because Tanner, for his opposition to the burning of witches, had himself been declared suspect of witchcraft. Diefenbach, 279.

²⁴⁹Frederic Spee, *Cautio Criminalis seu de Processibus contra Sagas*, Rome, 1657. Dub., XII.

²⁵⁰Id., Deb. XXIX.

²⁵¹Id., XX.

²⁵²Ibid.

²⁵³Id., XLIII.

throws interesting light on the classes of persons who rouse the Inquisition against witches. There are four classes: First, some theologians and prelates who are devoted to their studies and enjoy peace and tranquility; they have no idea of what is going on outside, no idea of the prisons, racks, etc. The second class is made up of skilled lawyers, who find the trials a profitable business. To the third class belong the unskilled and common people, who are malicious and seek to gratify their jealousy and enmity. To the fourth class belong those who have been accused themselves and who seek to cast the crime on someone else, these last are worse than all the others.²⁵⁴ Spee concludes the book with these words: "I cannot say more for grief and sorrow; I cannot publish this little book, nor translate it into German, which would not be without great benefit. One thing I ask of all educated, pious, prudent critics and I ask it by the judgment seat of the Almighty God, to read carefully and ponder over these lines: All magistrates and princes are in great danger of eternal perdition if they do not turn their closest attention to this matter. . . . May the authorities take care of themselves and the whole flock for which God will one day call them to account."²⁵⁵ The Jesuits of the time were anxious about the effect of the book, for great difficulties were likely to arise on account of the way in which Spee had attacked judges and princes. It is known that some of the jurists even before the publication of this work had demanded the expulsion of the order from Germany, for protecting the witches. Of the princes who were most zealous in the witch-persecution, not a few were protectors and benefactors of Jesuit colleges. The Society had to expect their wrath if a member of the order censured them so severely.²⁵⁶ Yet the expected results did not follow and "the Society may point to his work as a

²⁵⁴Spee, *op. cit.*, Dub., XV.

²⁵⁵Spee, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

²⁵⁶Schwickerath, *Am. Cath. Quart. Review*, 508.

full off-set for the deplorable blunders committed by Delrio and Gregory de Valentia.²⁵⁷

Two other Jesuits, George Scherer and Jeremias Drexelius, took the opposite side and urged the secular authorities to persecute witches. . . . Scherer (1583) brings demoniacal possession into close connection with witchcraft, and gives an example of the exorcising of a possessed girl whose grandmother was a witch. The statements of the witch at the questioning (torture) and on the rack, are for Scherer conclusive evidence of her guilt. He advises the magistrate of Vienna to proceed against all sorceresses with suitable punishment.²⁵⁸ This exhortation to the persecution of witches did not meet with the approval of the General of the Society, Claudius Aquaviva, who wrote to the provinces of the Society as follows: "Even if it is allowable to give the general advice as to the adoption of measures against poisoning which in that district is said to be widespread, and also to admonish witches, that they are in duty bound when interrogated, to name their accomplices, nevertheless the Fathers must not mix themselves in the witch-trials and must not insist on the punishment of witches; they must have nothing to do with exorcising them, to prevent them recanting their statements; for these things do not concern us."²⁵⁹

Drexelius treats of witchcraft in a work on *Almsgiving*, published in 1637, in which he gives as a reason for bestowing alms the fact that it protects from witchcraft.²⁶⁰ He writes, "who could dare accuse of error and injustice the judges, who, with fire and sword, proceed against this pest (witchcraft)? Yet there are Christians unworthy of the name, who oppose with might and main the extirpation of this vice, lest perhaps, they say, the innocent might suffer. O, ye enemies

²⁵⁷Schwickerath, 509.

²⁵⁸Duhr, *op. cit.*, 28.

²⁵⁹*Id.*, 32.

²⁶⁰*Id.*, 70.

of the Divine honor! Does not the law of God command, 'You shall not suffer wizards to live?' And I cry out as loud as I can, at the divine bidding, to bishops, princes and kings; you shall not suffer witches to live. Extirpate this pest with fire and sword.'²⁶¹

In the annual reports of the Jesuits there is frequent mention of trials of witches, and sorceresses and of the spiritual consolation which the Fathers administered to the victims; frequent instances are cited of how they led back into the right way women or men who, under demoniacal influence, had committed dreadful crimes; but there is not a single instance of their having brought anyone before the court, or given any encouragement to witch-burning.²⁶²

The clerical instruction books of this period show how deeply the belief in witches, in the transformation of human beings into wolves, in changelings bred of wicked women by the devil, was rooted among the people; especially is this true of Germany. In a confession manual of 1474, the penitent is asked the following questions: Have you practised magic on any, or let yourself be practised upon; bewitched anyone or let yourself be bewitched? Have you superstitiously believed in the weather-witches or in the changing of children? Have you bought any wind from a sorceress?²⁶³ In another book of the same period, occurs this question: "Have you believed that women can change themselves into cats, monkeys, and other animals and fly up through the air and suck the blood out of children?"²⁶⁴

Stephen Lanzkranna, provost of St. Dorothy's in Vienna, in his *Himmelstrasse* of 1484, classed among the greatest sins, belief in women who rode about at night, night-mares, were-wolves and other such heathenish impostures. He says, "Such like idiotic opinions and false

²⁶¹Duhr, op. cit., 70.

²⁶²Cited by Duhr, 73.

²⁶³Janssen, op. cit VIII, 542.

²⁶⁴Id., VIII, 541.

inventions and superstitions are so plentiful, even alas, among those who call themselves Christians and want to be regarded as Christians, although in reality they are more heathen than Christian.'"²⁸⁵

A Lubeck confession book, *Das Licht der Seele* of 1484, formulates the following questions: "Have you done harm to anyone with the devilish art? Have you practised witchcraft with the Holy Sacraments? Have you believed that people can become werewolves? Have you believed that people fly at night with body and soul into distant lands? Have you believed that people come at night and crush others in their sleep? Let each one search his own conscience and make a clean breast to his father confessor.'"²⁸⁶ A confession manual of 1485 asks the following: "Have you believed that the Nightmare (an old woman called Drude) has sat on you or that you have ridden on an oven fork to the Blocksberg (where the Sabbats were held)? These things are grave mortal sins and whoever dies in them brings his soul into everlasting damnation.'"²⁸⁷

There were other penitentials of this period, written mainly for the instruction of confessors and based on the decrees of Gratian and Gregory IX, as well as the Corrector of Burchard. It is not the intention of the writer to take them up in detail as they varied but little and from a consideration of one or two the main points of all may be judged. The "*Canones poenitentiales Astesani*," composed probably in 1444, contains a number of directions for the guidance of confessors. Among the various sins worthy of penance, is sacrilege, under which are found magic practices; thus Canon 34 says that those who purify (in the pagan sense, lustrat) the house, with magic arts and incantations shall do five years' penance.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵Janssen, VIII, 541 seqq.

²⁸⁶Ibid.

²⁸⁷Ibid.

²⁸⁸Schmitz, op. cit., 805: "Qui lustrat domum suam cum magicis artibus et incantationibus V annis peniteat."

Whoever makes use of sorcery, let him do forty days' penance.²⁶⁹ The *Poenitentiale Mediolanense* goes more into detail; thus a penance of ten years is decreed for those who sacrifice to the demons;²⁷⁰ for one who invokes the devil, seven years' penance;²⁷¹ for a woman who bewitches others, one year; for those who consult magicians, five years'.²⁷² Those who produce tempests shall do seven years, three of which shall be on bread and water.²⁷³ For those who make use of ligatures, the penance shall be for two years.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁹Ibid.

²⁷⁰Schmitz, op. cit., 809.

²⁷¹Id., 810.

²⁷²Ibid.

²⁷³Id., 811.

²⁷⁴Id.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHURCH, 1200-1700

POPES AND COUNCILS

Down to the thirteenth century, and after civil legislation against witches sanctioned death by fire, the Church only approved of disciplinary punishments for these offenders and their exclusion from its communion. But things assumed a different shape after the belief in witchcraft was strengthened by the reappearance of the Gnostic-Manichæan sects, which taught that there were two conflicting, equally powerful, coeternal principles, a good principle and a bad principle, the latter being creator and ruler of the material universe. Allied with these heretics were the Cathari, Albigenses, Waldenses, Luciferians, all of whom were accused of dreadful crimes, especially that of invoking the devil by certain prayers, as a result of which he visited their assemblies and led them into all imaginable vices. Hansen says, "It is unmistakable how much encouragement was given to beliefs in demoniacal influences and the intercourse possible between human beings and demons by Catharism, in consequence of its dualistic philosophy."²⁷⁵ The "black death" which devastated Europe in the fourteenth century was regarded as a work of the diabolical powers and in many cases, the emotion aroused by the calamity, amounted to frenzy. In some parts of Europe, notably Germany, the Flagellants, thousands in number, traversed the country and proclaimed in the midst of their wild dances, the power of Satan. All of these factors combined to bring the question of witchcraft more forcibly before the Church, with the result that we find many references to the practice in Papal Bulls and letters and in conciliar decrees. At the same time the punishments inflicted be-

²⁷⁵Hansen, *Zauberwahn*, 240

came more severe and when the Inquisition was established, witchcraft as well as heresy, became one of the common charges against the objects of the inquisitorial process. With the fifteenth century came a notable increase in witch-persecution, and in that and the succeeding century, while the great strife between Catholicism and Lutheranism was taking place, the number of those accused of communication with the devil, was greater than in all the preceding centuries. This was due, in great part, to the teaching of some of the reformers, which added fuel to the persecution. In Luther's catechism, the power attributed to the devil over man's body and soul, life and property, amounts almost to omnipotence. The friends and followers of Luther shared these views and it was soon noticed that the preachers spoke more of the devil than of Christ, and that young and old believed more in the devil than in God and His holy Gospel.

When we come to investigate the action of the Popes during this period from 1200-1700 we find that a number of them issued decrees treating of the reality of magic and witchcraft. In 1258 and 1260 Pope Alexander IV wrote to the Franciscan and Dominican inquisitors that they were to leave the punishment of sorcerers to the secular judges, unless there was manifest heresy. "*Cum negotium fidei, quod summe privilegiatum existit, per occupationes alias non debeat impediri, inquisitores ipsi de iis, nisi manifeste haeresim saperent, ratione huiusmodi officii sibi commissi se nullatenus intromittant, sed eos relinquunt suis iudicibus poena debita castigandos.*"²⁷⁶

In 1303 Boniface VIII ordered an investigation into the accusation made against Walter, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, treasurer of Edward I, that the said bishop had paid homage to the devil.²⁷⁷ It is well to note that Edward I intervened in his behalf and it was finally

²⁷⁶Hansen, Quellen, 1.

²⁷⁷Hansen, op. cit., 2.

proved that the report emanated from his enemies, so the bishop was allowed to purge himself with thirty-seven compurgators.

The growing importance of witchcraft and sorcery in popular belief, received a new impetus from the decrees of Pope John XXII. In 1318 he wrote to Bishop Bartholomew of Fréjus and Prior Peter Textoris in the diocese of Rodez, commissioning them to make an investigation concerning some clerics and laics who were practising necromancy and allied arts, "*se nigromancie, geomancie et aliarum magicarum artium moliminibus implicarunt et implicant, scripta et libros habentes huiusmodi artium, que quidem, cum sint artes demonum ex quadam pestifera sociate hominum et angelorum exorte etc.*"²⁷⁸ If these persons prove rebellious, they are to be compelled under ecclesiastical censure to give up their evil practices. Two years later, this same Pope had letters sent out by the Cardinal of Sancta Sabina concerning the homage rendered by some people to the devil, the making of a pact with Satan, the abuse by witches of the Sacraments and Sacramentals. The letters order the bishops to inquire about those who sacrifice to demons, or adore them, or make a pact either tacit or expressed with them, or those who abuse the sacrament of baptism by baptizing images fashioned of wax, as well as those who abuse the sacrament of the Eucharist. Such persons are to be punished according to the canons concerning heresy.²⁷⁹ In the Bull

²⁷⁸Hansen, *op. cit.*, 3.

²⁷⁹"Dominus Iohannes . . . vult ordinat vobisque committit, quod auctoritate sua contra eos, qui demonibus immolant vel ipsos adorant aut homagium ipsis faciunt, dando eis in signum cartam scriptam seu aliud quodcumque, vel qui expressa pacta obligatoria faciunt cum eisdem aut qui operantur vel operari procurant quamcumque ymaginem vel quodcumque aliud ad demonem alligandum seu cum demonum invocatione ad quodcumque maleficium perpetrandum aut qui sacramento baptismatis abutendo ymaginem de cera seu de re alia factam baptizant sive faciunt baptizari seu alias cum invocatione demonum ipsam fabricant . . . item de sortilegis et maleficis, qui sacramento eucharistie . . . et aliis sacramentis ecclesie . . . abutuntur, possitis inquirere et alias procedere contra ipsos, modis tamen servatis, qui de procedendo cum prelati in facto heresis vobis a canonibus sunt prefixi."

of 1326 he spoke again of those who made a pact with the devil, adored him, fabricated images, imprisoned demons in rings or mirrors and threatened with the penalties attached to heresy, all who were guilty and who did not reform within eight days.²⁸⁰ In 1330 the same Pope sent a decree to the Archbishops of Narbonne and Toulouse, to their suffragans and to the inquisitors of Carcassonne and Toulouse, removing sorcery from the jurisdiction of the Inquisition.²⁸¹ The next year he ordered Bishop Hugo of Paris, on the ground of a complaint preferred by King Philip VI of France, to make an investigation concerning certain clerics and laics who had attempted to use witchcraft against the king and his companions. "*Viros maleficos humani generis quodammodo inimicos eo ferventius persequi debet auctoritas presidentis, quo periculosius saluti publice parantes insidias etiam pulsare non metuunt occultis maleficiis regiam dignitatem . . . tibi per dictum regem nominandas (i.e., personas) super quibusdam eorum maleficiis et excessibus, que adversus ipsius regis et curie sue personas commisisse dicuntur, crimen lese maiestatis in eundem regem propterea perpetrando . . . inquirendi . . . procedendi . . . faciendi . . . quicquid iusticia suadebit, necnon compescendi . . . plenam et liberam tenore presentium concedimus facultatem.*"²⁸²

Benedict XII in 1336 ordered Bishop William of Paris and William of Carcassonne to correct and punish witches and sorcerers,²⁸³ mentioning by name some who had been accused of such practices. From an explanation by the Papal Court, of the payment of a copyist during a trial for sorcery, we get an idea of the prevalence of magic among all classes of people. In the paper referred to are mentioned nine persons, among them a rector of a church, a Brother, a cleric, and several women, all accused of

²⁸⁰Bullarium, IV, 316.

²⁸¹Hansen, op. cit., 6.

²⁸²Id., 7.

²⁸³Id., 8.

witchcraft.²⁸⁴ In 1336 also, Benedict wrote to Count Gaston de Foix, commanding him to send two men suspected of witchcraft to the Papal Court for trial.²⁸⁵ The next year this pope wrote to William Lombard of Mirepoix urging him to investigate the case of two men held in the papal prisons on the charge of sorcery.²⁸⁶ A document, dated a few months later, gives the cost for the maintenance of the above-mentioned prisoners, a priest and a layman, who, for the invocation of demons and for the practice of witchcraft, had been imprisoned 150 days.²⁸⁷ In June, 1337, Benedict wrote to the Dean Arnaldus of St. Paul, in the diocese of Alet, and to the Archdeacon Peter of Luna, in the diocese of Béziers, commanding them to investigate the case of clerics and a laic of Béziers, who had accused their bishop, William, of attempting to kill Pope John XXII by means of a magic waxen image, or figurine.²⁸⁸ The case was later dismissed as sufficient proof was not forthcoming. In 1338 the same Pope wrote to William Lombard in the diocese of Fréjus, concerning two women who had given themselves to the devil and had committed many of the crimes attributed to witches. These women were to be punished as justice required, yet justice should be tempered with mercy, "*Nos igitur talia et similia extirpari de finibus fidelium dictasque mulieres de tantis corrigi facinoribus lima iusticie cupientes, discretioni tue . . . punire ac corrigere penitentiasque ipsis imponere studeas, sicut iusticia exegerit, cum temperamento tamen misericordie, prout earum contritio meruerit et rationi convenire cognoveris, salutare.*"²⁸⁹ That monks and clerics also were not free from the practices of the age, can be gathered from Benedict's letter to Durandus, abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Bolbona, concerning some of his monks who sought by magic means, especially

²⁸⁴Hansen, *op. cit.*, 8, 9.

²⁸⁵*Ibid.*

²⁸⁶*Id.*, 10, 11.

²⁸⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸⁸*Ibid.*

²⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 13, 14.

by waxen images, to find a hidden treasure. For this they were to be severely punished.²⁹⁰

Pope Gregory XI, in 1374 wrote to the Dominican James de Morerio, inquisitor in France, empowering him to attempt to hinder by means of the Church's censure, those who offered sacrifice to the devil.²⁹¹ Alexander V in 1409 wrote to the Franciscan Pontius Fougeyron, that witches, diviners and invokers of demons should be punished and that the State might be called in, if necessary, "*invocato ad hoc, si opus fuerit, auxilio brachii secularis.*"²⁹²

Pope Eugenius IV in 1434 wrote to the same Pontius, that in many regions there were to be found, besides dogmatic heretics, "many Christians given over to witchcraft, divination, invocation of demons, conjurations, superstitions, use of prohibited arts, by whom simple Christians are perverted."²⁹³ "These erring ones are to be led back to the Church." "*Oviculas . . . errantes . . . ad ovile dominicum reducere.*" Three years later, this same pope wrote to all the inquisitors concerning certain people who immolated to demons, and by their aid performed many marvels. "*Ad nostrum non sine gravi mentis amaritudine pervenit auditum, quod plerosque Christi sanguine mercatos adeo tenebrarum princeps, ut eos suorum damnationis lapsusque participes efficiat, eius infascinavit astutiis, quod ipsi detestabiles illius suorumque satellitum suasus et illusiones coecitate noxia sectantes, demonibus immolant, eos adorant, ab ipsis responsa prestolantur et acceptant, illis homagium faciunt et in signum desuper chartam scriptam (the pact) vel quid aliud tradunt, cum ipsis obligatoria, ut solo verbo, tactu vel signo maleficia, quibus velint, illis inferant sive tollant, infirmitates sanent, aeris intemperiem provocent, et super aliis nefandis pacta firmant.*" "Such

²⁹⁰Hansen, op. cit., 14-17.

²⁹¹Ibid.

²⁹²Ibid.

²⁹³Ibid.

persons are to be imprisoned, to incur ecclesiastical censure and, if necessary, to be handed over to the secular power.²⁹⁴ In 1440, writing against the anti-pope, Felix V, Eugenius IV spoke of him as the leader of unfortunate men and women given over to sorcery and seduced by the devil; "these people," he says, "are commonly called 'stregule' or 'stregones' (striga) or Vaudois."²⁹⁵ The same pope wrote to the Inquisitor of Carcassonne in 1445 directing him to seek out those who gave themselves to magic practices.²⁹⁶ Pope Calixtus III in 1457 wrote to his nuncio, Bernard of Bosco, that he had heard with astonishment that in the diocese of Brescia there were some ecclesiastics who were teaching falsely concerning Jesus Christ and His blessed Mother, also perverting the simple people by teaching them magic arts; these ecclesiastics were to be diligently sought out and severely punished.²⁹⁷

In 1459 Pius II called the attention of the Abbot of Treguier to the existence of magic practices in Brittany and gave him papal authority for their suppression.²⁹⁸ In 1473 Sixtus IV desired the Vicar general of Bologna to make a report concerning a Carmelite who had taught that it was not heretical to expect an answer from the devil.²⁹⁹ The same pope, five years later forbade the manufacture and blessing as well as the sale "of pieces of wax, with the figure of a lamb commonly called the Agnus Dei;" they were to be reserved especially for the Pope.³⁰⁰ In 1483 Sixtus sent word to the Dominicans at Schlettstadt, that he had given one of his servitors who had proved himself so zealous in dealing with the hereti-

²⁹⁴Hansen, Quellen, 17.

²⁹⁵Id., 18.

²⁹⁶Id., 19.

²⁹⁷Id., 19.

²⁹⁸Id., 20.

²⁹⁹Id., 21.

³⁰⁰Id., 21. The reason for this restriction regarding the Agnus Dei was because they might more easily furnish material for necromantic practices, if allowed to be too widely disseminated.

cal witches of Germany, an indulgence of three years and also pecuniary aid.³⁰¹

On the strength of the reports which reached him from Germany, Pope Innocent VIII in 1484, issued his famous Bull, "*Summis desiderantes affectibus*," in which he said that he had learned that in some parts of south Germany, as also in the provinces, towns, lands, districts, and bishoprics of Mayence, Cologne, Treves, Salzburg and Bremen, large numbers of people of both sexes, were falling away from the Catholic faith, entering into alliances with devils and by their enchantments, ill-wishings and other unworthy acts of sorcery, causing great injury of all kinds to human beings and to animals.³⁰² The Bull continues, "although the two Dominicans and professors of theology, Henry Institor in south Germany and James Sprenger in some parts of the Rhine-land, had been appointed by papal authority as inquisitors of heretical wickedness, nevertheless, certain clergyman and laymen in those places had asserted that because in the letters appointing the said inquisitors the names of those dioceses and towns and the names of the persons and their crimes had not been expressly mentioned, the inquisitors dared not exercise their office or arrest and punish the people." Accordingly strict orders are now issued that both inquisitors should exercise the authority of their office unhindered, against persons of every rank. For protection against sorcery they were to explain the Word

³⁰¹Hansen, *op. cit.*, 22.

³⁰²Bullarium, V, 296: "*Quamplures utriusque sexus personae, propriae salutis immemores et a fide catholica deviantes, cum daemonibus incubis et succubis abuti ac suis incantationibus, carminibus et coniurationibus aliisque nefandis superstitiis et sortilegiis, excessibus, criminibus et delictis mulierum partus, animalium foetus, terrae fruges, vinearum uvas et arborum fructus necnon homines, mulieres, iumenta, pecora, pecudes et alia diversorum generum animalia, . . . perire, suffocari et extinguere facere et procurare . . . fidem praeterea ipsam, quam in sacri susceptione baptismi susceperunt, ore sacrilego abnegare, aliaque quamplurima nefanda, excessus et crimina, instigante humani generis inimico, committere et perpetrare non verentur, in animarum suarum periculum, divinae maiestatis offensam ac perniciosum exemplum ac scandalum plurimorum.*"

of God in all parish churches, and to use all means of instructing the people. The Pope called especially on the Bishop of Strasburg to protect the inquisitors and to inflict the most severe penalties on all those who opposed them and, if necessary, he was to call in the help of the secular power.³⁰³

This Papal Bull contains no dogmatic decision concerning witchcraft. The Pope referred historically only, to the different horrible incidents which were reported to him and thus the Bull settles nothing in detail, either regarding the objective effect produced by the will of the sorcerer, or the manner in which it might show itself. The Bull, also, introduced nothing new. The two inquisitors "in respect of the crime of witchcraft," were given plenary power more narrowly defined, and if the secular courts pronounced sentence of death against those offenders handed over to them, as incorrigible, by the ecclesiastical court this punishment was not the result of the Bull, for 200 years before the civil law, the *Sachsenspiegel*, had decreed that sorcerers and witches should be put to death by fire. Neither can this Bull be accepted as a cause of the barbarities which in the following centuries were committed in connection with the persecution and punishment of witches.³⁰⁴ The Bull, however, certainly did encourage the punishment of witches in so far as it spurred the inquisitors on to greater zeal in their proceedings. Duhr says, "The Bull by no means set forth a doctrine which it is obligatory to accept. It must be allowed that the Pope was badly informed by credulous and uncritical inquisitors and helped on the cause of injustice by his Bull, the witch-burners being able to appeal to papal authority. German bishops ought to have enlightened the Holy See on the true character of the trials, but most of the bishops were infected with the witch-superstition, and to some extent, as secular rulers, were also partici-

³⁰³ Bullarium, V, 296; Hansen, *Zauberwahn*, 467, 468.

³⁰⁴ Janssen, VIII, 551 seqq.

pators in the burning of witches.³⁰⁵ According to Hansen, the importance of the witch-bull lies less in its contents, which offer nothing new, than in the immense circulation which it gained through the press, whereas the older mis-sives had been limited to a small circle.³⁰⁶

As a result of the Bull, one of the inquisitors, Institor, drew up a memorandum of instructions as to the manner of procedure in witch-trials: he declared denial of the existence of witchcraft to be heresy, and mentioned as the chief crimes of witches: production of storms, disturbance of the human understanding even to insanity, the rousing of hatred and love, the hindrance of fecundity in human beings and animals, and even the taking of life. On all these points the pastors were to instruct the people and admonish every one to give information concerning persons suspected of witchcraft. Within a year after the publication of the Bull and the memorandum, Institor had been notified of fifty suspected persons, of whom all but two were women.³⁰⁷ In 1485 Innocent wrote to Archduke Sigmund of Austria and Abbot John of Weingarten praising them for the efficient aid given to the inquisitors Institor and Sprenger in their attempts to annihilate witchcraft and sorcery. The next year this pope informed the Bishop of Brescia that all those guilty of the crimes of witchcraft were ipso facto excommunicated.³⁰⁸

Alexander VI in 1500 wrote to the Prior of Klosterneuburg and to the Inquisitor Institor, concerning the spread of witchcraft in Bohemia and Moravia; he bade them preach against these diabolical arts and, if necessary, call in the secular power.³⁰⁹ The next year Alexander gave full power to the Dominican inquisitor in Lombardy, Angelo of Verona, to punish those of both sexes, who were given to the diabolic art of witchcraft.³¹⁰

³⁰⁵Duhr, *op. cit.*, 16.

³⁰⁶Hansen, *Zauberwahn*, 469 ff.

³⁰⁷Hansen, *Quellen*, 28, 29.

³⁰⁸Hansen, *op. cit.*, 28.

³⁰⁹*Ibid.*

³¹⁰*Id.*, 31.

Julius II between 1503-1513 wrote to the inquisitor of Cremona, George of Casali, ordering him despite the opposition of priests and people, to be zealous in his work of hunting out persons of both sexes who abused the Sacraments, accepted the devil as their lord and master, rendering obedience to him; who did injury to animals, who destroyed the fruits of the earth and "aliaque quamplurima nefanda excessus et crimina eodem diabolo instigante committentes."³¹¹ In 1521 Leo X brought forward a protest against the interference of the Venetian senators in the procedure of the inquisitors of Brescia and Bergamo against sorcerers. The Pope ordered the inquisitors to make use of excommunication and interdict.³¹²

Hadrian VI in 1523 gave the Dominican inquisitor of Como, Modestus Vincentinus, the right to proceed against witches and sorcerers, as also did Clement VII, in 1524 to the governor of Bologna. In 1526 the same pope directed the Dean and canons of Sion to act in the punishment of heresy and sorcery.³¹³

Two later bulls have some reference to the current superstition; in 1586 Sixtus V decreed that not only those who made use of magic arts should be punished, but also those who read any books dealing with such practices. "Prohibentes omnes et singulos libros opera, etc., . . . astrologiae, geomantie, etc., artes magicae, aut in quibus sortilegia, veneficia, auguria continentur."³¹⁴ The last papal ordinance against witchcraft was issued by Gregory XV; this was the Bull *Omnipotentis Dei*, 1623. The Bull lessened the former punishments and decreed that the death penalty should be inflicted only upon those proved to have entered into a compact with the devil and to have committed homicide with his assistance.

³¹¹Hansen, op. cit., 32.

³¹²Bullarium, VI, 24.

³¹³Hansen, op. cit., 37.

³¹⁴Bullarium, VIII, 646.

As a general thing Church Councils during the period under discussion did not formulate many decrees directly against witchcraft. In 1212 the Council of Paris declared that clerics or monks who used spells should be degraded "clerici vel monachi, qui conjurationem fecerint, gradu excidant."³¹⁵ The synods of Rouen (1231), Tours (1236), Le Mans (1238), Liège and Carcassonne (1272), Ravenna and Cologne (1280) were mainly occupied with the sinful character of witchcraft and declared it to be a sin which was reserved to the bishop for absolution.³¹⁶ The councils of Nantes (1264), Utrecht, Constance, the provincial councils of Mainz (1261), Béziers and Nogaret (1290), Venice (1296), decreed the penalty of excommunication for laics devoted to the practice of magic, and for priests, suspension.³¹⁷ Among the deeds worthy of such punishment were included witchcraft, incantations, divination, invocation of demons, killing of children by magic arts, as well as the abuse of the Holy Eucharist or one of the other Sacraments of the Church for some devilish purpose.³¹⁸ The council of Grado (1296) declared that no one should make use of magic arts to procure the love of another; it also decreed excommunication for soothsayers and witches.³¹⁹ Besides excommunication other punishments were inflicted; thus the council of Valence (1248) decreed that, with the Pope's consent, in the Church provinces of Narbonne, Vienne, Arles and Aix as well as in fifteen other dioceses, witches and sorcerers should be delivered to the bishop and if they proved unrepentant, they were to be imprisoned or otherwise punished at the discretion of the bishop. "Item de sacrilegis et sortiariis, quocumque nomine censeantur, et specialiter de his, qui magistri sunt vel doctores in opere tam damno, statuimus quod,

³¹⁵Mansi, XXII, 830.

³¹⁶Mansi, XXIII, 213, 477; XXIV, 363; Hefele, V, 894, 938, 1050; VI, 187.

³¹⁷Mansi, VI, XXIV, 1066, 1163; Hefele, VI, 335.

³¹⁸Hefele, VI, 206, 231.

³¹⁹Hefele, VI, 368.

si inventi fuerint, reddantur suo episcopo, et si moniti non resipuerint, immurentur vel ad arbitrium episcopi puniantur.³²⁰

Two provincial councils held in 1310 at Mainz and Trier declared all practitioners of magic excommunicate.³²¹ The latter council also stated that no woman must give out that she rode at night with Diana or Herodias, nor must any one use the Pater Noster and the Creed for magic formulae.³²² The synod of Bergamo (1311) decreed excommunication for practitioners of witchcraft, while that of Rouen (1321) declared that the misuse of the Sacraments for purposes of witchcraft, should be punished by excommunication.³²³ The general synod called by the Cardinal legate, William of Valladolid in 1322,³²⁴ and the diocesan synods of Alcalà and Salamanca, 1335, declared excommunicate not only all practitioners of witchcraft but also those who had recourse to them.³²⁵ A council at Rouen (1335) summoned by Pope Benedict XII, declared that all soothsayers and witches and all those who sought their aid were ipso facto excommunicated.³²⁶ The Norwegian synod of Tonsberg (1336) warned the faithful against witchcraft and poisoning and punished with excommunication those who made use of soothsaying and witchcraft.³²⁷ In 1349 Archbishop Arnest summoned a provincial council at Prague, which ordered all pastors to warn their congregations that all magic practices would incur the penalty of excommunication; notwithstanding this admonition, a second council at Prague, 1407, was forced to lament the toleration of witchcraft, by many pastors. "Multi sortilegi, in diversis parochiis commorantur et publice tolerantur per pleba-

³²⁰Mansi, XXIII, 769.

³²¹Id., XXV, 247, 297.

³²²Hefele, VI, 492.

³²³Mansi, XXV, 475.

³²⁴Hefele, VI, 609.

³²⁵Mansi, XXV, 1047.

³²⁶Hefele, VI, 643.

³²⁷Ibid.

nos. . . . Mandatur plebanis universis et singulis, quatenus tales sortilegos et sortilegas non tolerant ulterius in parochiis eorum, sed corrigant et expellant tales, pro poenitentia peragenda ad superiorum audientiam remittant.³²⁸ According to the synod of Magdeburg (1390) witches were to be severely punished.³²⁹

In the fifteenth century we find the idea of magic still all pervading. In Norway, the synod of Oslo (Opsloe, 1436) forbade magic. The synods of Freising (1440 and 1480), Lisieux (1456), Upsala (1443-48), Eichstatt (1453) and Salzburg (1456) decreed excommunication for witches and soothsayers, also for all who used the Sacraments in their unlawful practice.³³⁰ A synod of Rouen (1445) provided a more severe punishment than excommunication, it decreed that all who besought the devil's aid should wear a badge of shame, but if they abjured they could be released by the bishop after they had performed a suitable penance; if they relapsed into their evil ways, clerics were to be degraded and perpetually imprisoned, laics were to be abandoned to the secular arm.³³¹ This same synod condemned all books and tracts on magic.³³² A synod at Mantua (1460) punished all who practiced magic arts.³³³ By the decrees of the council of Seville (1512) magicians and soothsayers were to be punished by excommunication and were forced to pay a certain amount of gold; if they repeated the offense, infamy and exile were to be their portion.³³⁴ The council of Florence (1517-18) declared that at the visitation of dioceses punishment should be meted out to those who used magic, sorcery, and divination. The synod of Regensburg (1527) decreed that clerics who gave themselves to sorcery, magic, and soothsaying, which the Holy Scriptures

³²⁸Mansi, XXVI, 75; Hefele, VI, 688.

³²⁹Hefele, VI, 972.

³³⁰Id., VIII, 16, 7, 21, 51.

³³¹Id., VIII, 9.

³³²Id.

³³³Id., 123.

³³⁴Id., 547.

and the writings of the Fathers forbade, should be punished and if they proved obstinate, they were to be deposed and imprisoned in a monastery.³³⁵

³³⁵Hefele, IX, 557.

CHAPTER VIII

INQUISITION AND PERSECUTION OF WITCHES

A new epoch in the history of witch-persecution began when sorcery and magic were put on a par with heresy and thus came under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition. By this term is usually meant a special ecclesiastical institution for combating or suppressing heresy. Its characteristic mark is the bestowal on certain men, of judicial power in matters of faith, and this by supreme ecclesiastical authority.³³⁶ This tribunal of the Inquisition is a phase in the growth of ecclesiastical legislation, whose distinctive traits can be best understood by a study of the conditions amid which it grew up; what these conditions were may be seen by the following brief survey. We have learned from the conciliar and papal decrees of the first twelve centuries, from the opinions of ecclesiastical writers and from the penitentials of the various countries, that the usual penalties inflicted for the practice of magic and witchcraft, were fasting, almsgiving, scourging, incarceration for a limited period or for life.³³⁷ The heretical tendency of witchcraft during these ages, was not fully established and even had it been the penalties would not have been more severe, for the Christians of the first three centuries, following St. Paul's teaching,³³⁸ deemed exclusion from the Church's communion, sufficient punishment for heresy.³³⁹ Therefore, they rejected absolutely the punishment by death and established the doctrine, "Ecclesia abhorret a sanguine."³⁴⁰ Origen replying to Celsus explained that one must distinguish between the law which the Jews received from Moses and

³³⁶Blotzer, Cath. Ency., VIII, art. Inquisition.

³³⁷Chapters III, IV.

³³⁸I Tim. I, 20; Tit. III, 10.

³³⁹Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Tertullian adversus Gnosticos, Cap. II.

³⁴⁰Vacandard, L'Inquisition, 8.

that given to the Christians by Christ, the former was binding on the Jews, the latter on Christians. Jewish Christians, if sincere, were no longer at liberty to kill their enemies or to burn and stone violators of the Christian law.³⁴¹ St. Cyprian of Carthage, in the midst of schismatics, put aside the sanction of the Old Testament, which punished with death any rebellion against the priesthood, and wrote, "Religion being now spiritual, its sanctions take on the same character, and excommunication replaces the death of the body."³⁴² Lactantius wrote in 308, that "Religion, being a matter of the will, cannot be forced on anyone; in this matter it is better to employ words than blows. . . . There is no connection between truth and violence, between justice and cruelty. It is true that nothing is so important as religion and one must defend it at any cost. . . . If you attempt to defend it with bloodshed and torture, what you do is not defence, but desecration and insult. For nothing is so intrinsically a matter of free will as religion."³⁴³ The Christian teachers of the first three centuries, then, insisted on complete religious liberty; they urged the principle that religion could not be forced on others—a principle always adhered to by the Church in her dealings with the unbaptized—but, when comparing the Mosaic Law and the Christian religion, they taught that the latter was content with a spiritual punishment of heretics, while Judaism proceeded necessarily against its dissidents with torture and death.³⁴⁴

Constantine had some control over the temporal welfare of the Church; his imperial successors soon began to regard themselves as masters of the temporal and material conditions of the Church, while at the same time they were persuaded that the first concern of imperial

³⁴¹Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VII, 26.

³⁴²Cyprian, *Ep. LXII*, ad. Pomponium, n. 4.

³⁴³Lactantius, *De Divinis Institutionibus*, V, cap. XX.

³⁴⁴Blotzer, *Cath. Ency.*, VIII, art. Inquisition.

authority was the protection of religion, so, with terrible regularity they issued many penal edicts against heretics.³⁴⁵ All heretics were affected by this legislation, and in various ways, by exile, confiscation of property, or death. A law of 407, aimed at the Donatists, declared they ought to be regarded in the same class as transgressors against the sacred majesty of the emperor, a concept to which was reserved in later times a very momentous rôle.³⁴⁶ The death penalty, however, was reserved for certain Manichæan sects.³⁴⁷

At the close of the fourth century and during the fifth, Manichæism, Donatism and Priscillianism were the most prominent heresies, but the Church refused to invoke the civil power against them. Priscillian, Bishop of Avila, leader of the sect which bears his name, was accused of heresy and sorcery, and was found guilty by several councils. He seems to have been refused a hearing by St. Ambrose of Milan, and at length he appealed to the Emperor Maximus, who condemned him to death. St. Martin of Tours, then at Trier, endeavored to obtain the abandonment of the accusation since ecclesiastical deposition by the bishops was deemed sufficient punishment. The sentence of death was carried out, however, and when the execution was over, St. Martin strongly blamed the executioners and the emperor, and even for a long time refused to hold any communication with the bishops who had been responsible in any way for Priscillian's death.³⁴⁸ Priscillianism did not disappear with the death of its founder, but spread rapidly and by the adoption of Manichæism, became a great public menace. This accounts for the severe judgment of St. Augustine and St. Jerome against its teachings. The scandals of the Priscillianists during the fifth century, drew upon them the

³⁴⁵Vacandard, *op. cit.*, 10.

³⁴⁶*Id.*, 10.

³⁴⁷*Id.*, 12.

³⁴⁸*Id.*, 26-30.

attention of Pope Leo the Great, who, in 447, reproved them for loosening the marriage bonds, for rejecting all decency and deriding all law, human and divine.³⁴⁹ He declared it was natural that temporal rulers should punish the sacrilegious acts of the sect, and put to death the founder and some of his followers. He held that this redounded to the advantage of the Church, for though the Church was averse to the shedding of blood, yet she was aided by this imperial severity, fear of which drove the guilty to seek a spiritual remedy.³⁵⁰

The ecclesiastical ideas of the first five centuries may be briefly summed up as follows: St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Leo I, St. Chrysostom held that the Church should not shed blood; other teachers, as Optatus of Mileve and Priscillian himself, thought that the state could pronounce the death penalty on heretics, in case the public welfare demanded it and in support of this doctrine, they quoted the Old Testament.³⁵¹ Without recommending this theory, Pope Leo the Great, did not condemn the application in the case of the Priscillianists. The majority of the teachers held that the death penalty for heresy when not civilly criminal, was irreconcilable with the spirit of Christianity. St. Augustine for the western Church, says, speaking of heretics, "We wish them to be corrected, not put to death; we desire the triumph of discipline, not the death penalties which they deserve."³⁵² St. John Chrysostom says substantially the same for the eastern Church: "God forbids us to kill them, for he regards their conversion as possible; but He does not forbid us to repel them, to deprive them of free speech or to prohibit their assemblies."³⁵³ The assistance of the secular power was not, therefore, entirely rejected;

³⁴⁹Vacandard, *op. cit.*, 31.

³⁵⁰*Id.*, 32.

³⁵¹*Id.*, 33.

³⁵²Augustine, *Ep. c.*, n. 1.

³⁵³Chrysostom, *Homilia XLVI*, *Matthaeum*, cap. 2.

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and accepted a fitting penance were to be imprisoned for life, without prejudice to the other penalties for heresy, such as confiscation.³⁶⁵ These and other rescripts were adopted into ecclesiastical criminal law in 1231 and were soon applied at Rome. It was then that the Inquisition of the Middle Ages was instituted. The Pope did not establish the Inquisition as a distinct and separate tribunal; what he did was to appoint special judges, who executed their doctrinal functions in the name of the Pope. The inquisitors were chosen mainly, though not exclusively, from the Dominicans and Franciscans, who were sent through Lombardy, Germany, and France; wherever the inquisitors sat, there was the Inquisition. By a law of Frederick II, 1231, all suspects were to be tried by an ecclesiastical tribunal and if, being declared guilty, they refused to abjure, they were to be burned in presence of the people.³⁶⁶ By 1238 the legal penalty for heretics throughout the empire was burning at the stake. By 1255 the Inquisition was in full activity in all the countries of central and western Europe.³⁶⁷

The question may be asked, what is to be understood by the word heresy as used by the Inquisition? We can ascertain the meaning of the word from two canonists, St. Raymond of Pennafort and St. Thomas Aquinas. Raymond gives four meanings of the word heretic, but says that from the standpoint of canon law, "a heretic is one who denies the faith."³⁶⁸ St. Thomas is more accurate. He declares that no one is truly a heretic unless he obstinately maintains his error, even after it has been pointed out by ecclesiastical authority.³⁶⁹ (This is still the theological meaning.) By degrees, however, the word acquired a broader meaning, until superstition was included, and sorcery and magic were put on a par with

³⁶⁵Greg. IX, *Decretales*, cap. XV, *De haereticis*, lib. V, tit. 7.

³⁶⁶Eymeric, *Directorium Inquisitorum*, appendix 14. Venice, 1595.

³⁶⁷Vacandard, *op. cit.*, 163.

³⁶⁸*Id.*, 192.

³⁶⁹Aquinas, *II^a*, *II^{ae}*, *quaest.* 11.

heresy. Alexander IV decided that divination and sorcery did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition, unless there was manifest heresy involved;³⁷⁰ this rule at the end of the thirteenth century was embodied in the canon law by Boniface VIII. Alexander's definition left open for discussion a fairly extensive and intricate class of questions as to the degree of heresy involved in the occult arts, but casuists were not wanting to prove that heresy was involved in most cases. Thus, a figurine to be effective required to be baptized and this argued a heretical notion as to the Sacrament of Baptism. Again, few of the arts of the diviner in forecasting the future or in tracing stolen articles could be exercised without what the inquisitors assumed to be at least a tacit invocation of demons, which was heretical. To ask a demon, even without adoration, that which depends upon the will of God, indicated heretical notions as to the power of demons. Love potions and philters were heretical and so were spells and charms to cure diseases, the gathering of herbs while kneeling, face to ~~the east~~ and repeating the Pater Noster, as well as all the other devices which had been imposed on popular credulity. Alchemy was one of the seven demoniacal arts, for the aid of Satan was necessary for the transmutation of metals and the "philosopher's stone" was only to be obtained by spells and charms.³⁷¹ From the above enumeration it can be seen over how wide a field the Inquisition extended its jurisdiction, and to this extension, doubtless, may be attributed the increasing rigor which henceforth marked the persecution of sorcery.

In 1451 Nicholas V enlarged the powers of Hugues le Noir, inquisitor of France, by granting him jurisdiction over divination, even when it did not savor of sorcery.³⁷² In this way, astrologers, diviners, palmists, as well as

³⁷⁰Vacandard, *op. cit.*, 196.

³⁷¹Th. Aquin., *op. cit.*, II da., II dae quaest. XCV. Prierias *op. cit.*, Lib. III, c. 1. Eymeric, *op. cit.*, 342, 443.

³⁷²Ripoll, Bullar. III, 301.

sorcerers, became subject to the Inquisition. In 1458 the inquisitor Nicholas Jaquierius remarked that even if the night-flights of women were an illusion, they were none the less heretical as the followers of Diana and Herodias were necessarily heretics in their waking hours, since they rendered homage to the devil.³⁷³ About 1500 the inquisitor, Bernard of Como, taught categorically that the phenomena of witchcraft, especially attendance at the witches' Sabbat, were not fanciful but real, "This is proved," he says, "from the fact that the Popes have permitted witches to be burned at the stake; they would not have countenanced this, if these persons were not real heretics and their crimes only imaginary, for the Church only punishes proved crimes."³⁷⁴

The witchcraft fever of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries stimulated to an extraordinary degree the zeal of the inquisitors. The Bull, *Summis Desiderantes* of Innocent VIII, 1484, made matters worse. Innocent had no intention of committing the Church to a belief in the phenomena maintained in his Bull, but his personal opinion had a great influence on the canonists and inquisitors of his day; this is clear from the numerous trials for witchcraft during this period.³⁷⁵ It is impossible to estimate the number of sorcerers condemned by the Inquisition; Louis of Paramo declared that in a century and a half, from 1404, the Holy Office sent over thirty thousand witches and sorceresses to the stake, who, if they had been left unpunished, would easily have brought the whole world to destruction.³⁷⁶ This number is exaggerated; nevertheless, the abuse of condemnation in the matter of witchcraft was sufficient to excite the imagination and consequently to make possible accounts of incredible numbers who perished in the flames. The

³⁷³Vacandard, *op. cit.*, 197; Lea, *op. cit.*, 497.

³⁷⁴Comensis, *Lucerna*, 144.

³⁷⁵Janssen, *op. cit.*, VIII, 507.

³⁷⁶Vacandard, *op. cit.*, 242.

Papacy itself recognized the injustice practised by its agents, for in 1637 instructions were issued stigmatizing the conduct of the inquisitors on account of their arbitrary and unjust persecution of witches—they were accused of extorting from them by cruel torture, confessions that were valueless, and of abandoning them to the secular arm without sufficient cause.³⁷⁷

Persecution of witches by the Inquisition was prevalent in southern France, Germany and Italy, and hundreds of victims, frequently innocent, were burned at the stake.³⁷⁸ The death penalty, as has been already stated, was not decreed by the Church, but by the secular power after condemnation by the ecclesiastical court. The greatest penalties which the Inquisition could inflict were life imprisonment, exclusion from the communion of the Church and abandonment to the civil power. These penalties, moreover, were on many occasions remitted, mitigated or commuted, as the case might demand, and on the whole it may be said that the tribunal was humanely conducted.

Torture was not of ecclesiastical origin and was long prohibited in the ecclesiastical courts, yet, the Church must be considered responsible for having introduced it into the proceedings of the Inquisition, not as a mode of punishment, for it was not regarded as such, but merely as a means of eliciting the truth. It was first authorized by Innocent IV, in his Bull, *Ad exstirpanda*, 1252, which was confirmed by Alexander IV, 1259, and Clement IV, 1265. The Bull of Innocent IV states that "the podestà (ruler) is ordered to force all captured heretics to confess and accuse their accomplices by torture, which must not imperil life or injure limb," "*citra membri diminutionem et mortis periculum.*"³⁷⁹ Later

³⁷⁷Vacandard, *op. cit.*, 242.

³⁷⁸Mall. Malef. P. II, quaest. 1; P. III, q. 15; Comensis, *op. cit.*, c. III-VI.

³⁷⁹Eymeric, *op. cit.*, appendix, 8.

Clement V ordered that torture should not be administered by the tribunal of the Inquisition without the consent of the bishop, if this could be obtained within eight days.³⁸⁰ These restrictions left a great deal to the discretion of the inquisitors, some of whom, however, setting these limitations aside, acted with great severity. Besides flogging, the usual methods employed to obtain a confession of guilt were the rack, the strappado,³⁸¹ and burning coals. This torture was not to be applied unless the accused was uncertain in his statements and seemed already virtually convicted by many weighty proofs. In general, this violent questioning (*quaestio*) was to be deferred as long as possible and only resorted to when the judge was convinced that no gentler means would avail. In the beginning, torture was held to be so odious that the torturer was always a civil official; Church canons prohibited ecclesiastics from taking part in the "*quaestio*" and the inquisitor who accompanied the victim to the torture chamber was thereby rendered irregular and could not exercise his office until he obtained the necessary dispensation. The tribunals complained of this cumbersome mode and in 1260 Alexander V authorized the inquisitors and their associates to mutually grant all the needed dispensations for irregularities thus incurred.³⁸² This permission was renewed by Urban IV, 1262, and was practically an authorization to assist at the interrogatories at which torture was employed. From this time the ecclesiastics appeared in person in the torture chamber and the inquisitors' manuals record and approve the practice.³⁸³ The general rule was that torture was not to exceed a half-hour and was to be resorted to only once. This regulation was sometimes circumvented, first, by assum-

³⁸⁰Vacandard, *op. cit.*, 187.

³⁸¹The strappado consisted in raising the victim by means of ropes and pulley to some distance above the ground, and then allowing him to drop back suddenly.

³⁸²Eymeric, *op. cit.*, 132.

³⁸³*Id.*, 481.

ing that with every new piece of evidence the rack could be utilized again, and, second, by imposing fresh torments, often on different days, on the poor victim, not by way of repetition but as a continuation. Conscientious and sensible judges attached no great importance to confessions extracted by torture; Eymeric, after long experience, declared that "torture is deceptive and inefficacious," "Quaestiones sunt fallaces et inefficaces."³⁸⁴

When the victim of the inquisitorial process was a witch or a sorceress, there was not much mildness shown. The practice of the black art was so widespread in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, and people's minds were so filled with dread, that the inquisitor was often convinced in advance of the guilt of those brought before him as defamed for sorcery, and ancient expedients were improved upon and refined. Endurance of torture might formerly have been regarded as an evidence of innocence, now it was an additional proof of guilt, for it showed that Satan was endeavoring to save his servitor by the gift of taciturnity. In view of this satanic gift, torture was not always to be employed to obtain a confession; promises of pardon were freely made, and if the fraud was successful, the inquisitor commanded the sentence to be pronounced by someone else, or allowed an interval to elapse before himself sending his deluded victim to the stake.³⁸⁵

We cannot read any account of the witch-trials and fail to be impressed with the fact that the witches persisted in the truth of their confessions, no matter what promises or threats were held out to them. How may this be explained? There are several possible reasons. The witch, whom repetition of torture had reduced to a state of despair, naturally sought to make her confession square with the requirements of the judge; the confession once made, she was doomed and knew that retraction

³⁸⁴Eymeric, *op. cit.*, 481.

³⁸⁵Delrio, *op. cit.*, lib. V, sec. 9; Mall. *Malef.* P. III, Q. 13, 14.

II would only bring a prolongation of suffering. She therefore adhered to her confession and when it was read in public admitted its truth. In many cases, torture and prolonged imprisonment in foul dungeons produced partial mental derangement, easily leading to belief that she had committed the acts so persistently imputed to her. Again, desire to obtain the last Sacraments, which were only administered to repentant sinners, might induce some to maintain to the last, the truth of their confessions. No proof more unquestionable than this could be obtained and belief in these tales of witches was therefore unhesitating. These facts might lead us to believe in the truth of the statements made by the condemned, but with our present scientific knowledge we are more likely to assign the effects to different causes, physical and psychological.

III In the witch-trials themselves the accounts of the orgies between the devil and the witches, appear as the basis of witchcraft and present an appalling picture of the times. Frequently trials for immorality changed under the judges' hands into witch-trials and there can be no doubt that many of those who were so charged were people who had been guilty of grave offenses against morality.²⁸⁶ Nor can it be doubted that among men and women of every class, extensive use was made of intoxicants and narcotics, either as drinks or as salves, as, for instance, hellebore, deadly nightshade, white poppy, henbane, hashish, and so forth, which roused the passions and caused deep sleep, accompanied by all sorts of phantasms, in which the witches dreamed of dancing, eating, drinking, music and also believed that they were flying through space. According to Weyer's account of the witch-salves, the chief ingredients, besides a variety of innocuous things, were always the saps of narcotic herbs, which had a specially powerful effect on the sensorium.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶Zeitschrift für kathol. Theologie, XII, 135. Innsbruck.

²⁸⁷Weyer, *De praestigis daemonum, et incantationibus ac veneficiis*, Libri sex, Basle, 1568. Lib. II, Cap. 31.

Binz, in his *John Weyer*, remarks: "I could also prove from present-day medical experiences, that under such acute poisoning with narcotic drugs, women will have dreams having all the appearance of actuality."³⁸⁸ Frequently, according to reports of the trials, oils, salves, injurious powders were found in the dwelling places of the accused. According to the statements of the witches, the salves, for which the fat of murdered and unbaptized children was used by preference, served both for the necessary anointing for the performance of the witch-dances and for magic injury to human beings. Of real poison-mixers, there was no lack among the witches and sorceresses brought before the judges; and trials for murder, robbery and deadly injuries, like those for immorality, were often conducted as witch-trials, because the devil had the largest share in such acts and because he led all those who were subjugated by him into such inhuman abominations." "Many people entered into actual league with the devil and thought by the use of fiendish means to make themselves masters of super-human arts with a view to injuring their fellow-men."³⁸⁹

As an explanation of witch-trials in general, von Raumer says, "The witch-trials in which, in the preceding century, were seen only self-deception, intentional fraud, and sheer superstition, have in recent times regained importance for the reason that the experiences and data collected on the subject of magnetism and the phenomena of so-called somnambulism show at least this much, that underlying the facts which come down to us from the past, there is—to judge from all the circumstances—an actual state of exaltation, of ecstasy, and that under certain presupposed conditions one human being can work upon another in a manner far surpassing anything possible in a normal, healthy state, and which may to a certain

³⁸⁸Binz, Johan Weyer, 36; *Sorcellerie et Justice Criminelle à Valenciennes*. Valenciennes, 1861, 58.

³⁸⁹Janssen, op. cit., VIII, 667.

extent be characterized as bewitchment. Without, therefore, attributing any objective reality to the marvels of sorcerers, the leagues of witches with Satan, the nightly rides, and so forth, which we must always put down as superstition, it must nevertheless now be conceded that a certain element of reality may reasonably be recognized in many of the accounts of the bewitchment of human beings and cattle and the injury done by poisons and incantations; particularly it has been shown that diseased states of exaltation may pass from one to another by a kind of infection. Thus accounts preserved to us on this matter have at the present day a higher psychological interest, since they bear witness to peculiar subjective conditions on the dark side of mental life, which, though they must be regarded as mere abnormal conditions, are worthy of the same attention which every other enigmatical disease of the body deserves. The burning of witches (although frequently other crimes worthy of death were mixed up with witchcraft) must always be regarded as a most melancholy aberration, but we must none the less grant nowadays, that the superstition of our ancestors and their consequent misconception of justice, was essentially due to the fact that they attributed an actual objective reality to leagues with the devil, which, according to the ideas then current of the proper penalties for sins committed against God, it was right to punish with the severest mode of death.⁷³⁹⁰

Then, too, the people of the age were saturated with witchcraft; it could not be otherwise, since it was talked of in daily life and so excited the imagination. Even in the minds of those who were free from accusation, every witch-trial called up images which haunted them, waking and dreaming. The power of suggestion, then so little understood, must be taken into account; so much witchcraft was in the air that it forced itself on the fancy of the victims, making them appear guilty even in their

⁷³⁹⁰Von Raumer, Markische Hexenprozesse, 239.

own eyes; the judges, too, frequently suggested the subject matter of the confessions, to which the accused responded, scarcely knowing what they said or did. Janssen writes on this subject as follows: "The belief in witchcraft and sorcery, by which all brains were possessed and the concomitant terror of witches, that had become a popular craze were perpetually fed and strengthened, on the one hand by the demoralization, while on the other hand, they were an abundant source of vice and depravity, of greed, calumny, faithlessness, envy, persecution, bloodthirstiness and murder. In trials innumerable, the moral depravity of the torturers, the officials, judges and clerks plays a disgraceful part, whilst in case after case the whole judicial procedure against the witches was conducted in such a manner that many thousands of innocent victims were driven, mad with torture, to the stake, and out of every funeral pile rose a fresh crop of witches."⁷⁸⁹¹

It might, perhaps, be asked why this witch-persecution was so widespread and persistent, why thousands of innocent persons went to their death confessing an imaginary guilt, why the learning of theologians and the justice of judges was so blinded and led astray through so many centuries. There are several possible solutions of this difficulty. Fr. Schwickerath, S. J., writing in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review* for July, 1902, says: "There undoubtedly exists what the Germans call *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age, which affects all, for good or ill, which influences theologians as well as others, and even the supreme rulers of the Church in their private opinions and decisions, which do not possess the character of *ex cathedra* definitions. It is unfair and narrow-minded to look down with superciliousness on those who have gone before us, because they held many opinions which are now rejected by all enlightened minds. We must endeavor to judge men by the circumstances in which they lived. However, this cannot prevent us from

⁷⁸⁹¹ Janssen, *op. cit.*, VIII, 586.

deploring the existence of some of their opinions and the disastrous results to which they led. It cannot be denied that the credulity of medieval chroniclers and the lack of historical criticism on the part of great theologians of former ages was, to say the least, a most unfortunate feature; and in a matter of practical consequences, like that of witchcraft, it has proved extremely disastrous.⁷³⁹²

Other possible causes were: the lack of knowledge of medicine, so that certain diseases such as epilepsy, hysteria, or somnambulism were frequently treated and punished as sorcery and witchcraft; the almost total ignorance of the nature of mental disorders which were regarded as something contrary to nature and as evidence of punishable magic or necromantic influences. In many cases the witches were mentally afflicted persons, suffering from illusions of sight or hearing, and all that they said about the devil and his dominion over mental and bodily life, about devil's arts, about sabbats and orgies, was simply what they had heard from their youth up and had come in consequence to think they had themselves experienced. It is a well-known fact that some of the stronger emotions, if unchecked, may unbalance the mind. Fear presents strange phantasies to diseased imaginations, so that crude minds were fascinated and terrorized by eclipses, lightning, storms, which natural phenomena were explained by Satanic influence because of the natural horror of the unknown. Every species of excitement, every strong affection may lead to mental disorder. Poverty and starvation may be active agents in producing hallucinations in minds addicted to melancholy. The frequency of epidemics in the Middle Ages, which were preceded by periods of famine is well known to need comment. "Add to this the sickly, overwrought condition of the people in the later Middle Ages, which

⁷³⁹²Am. Cath. Quart. XXVIII, 478.

search after the prodigious, in visions, in astrological and cabalistic practices."³⁹³

One other cause of this widespread craze which must not be overlooked, especially in the sixteenth century in Germany, was the teaching of Luther and his followers, who did much to spread belief in the unbounded might of the devil. It is one of the chief characteristics of Luther that in his social intercourse, in speech, in writing, and in preaching he always brought in the devil, attributed far more influence and importance to him than is warranted by Scripture and so gained for him a popularity which he had never enjoyed. All this had worked with coarsening and damaging effect on theology and preaching, as well as on popular opinions, habits, literature and also on criminal justice. "All the slumbering germs of superstition among both the rude masses and the higher circles were by this means awakened and set in motion. The more the effectual means of salvation instituted by God, the Sacraments and sacramentals, were mocked and despised the more did empty, fraudulent, absurd superstition and devil worship grow up among the demoralized people."³⁹⁴

In spite, however, of all the fostering causes and influences enumerated, the witch-superstition would not have reached the dimensions which in fact it did reach, if the age had been less credulous and more critical. The witch craze must be looked upon as a malady of the period, an "intellectual epidemic," to which, unfortunately, the leading personalities in Church and state succumbed as children of the age. The analogy of an epidemic also holds good in that the superstition spread with incredible rapidity. "The imagination of a generally ignorant and neglected populace scented everywhere sorcery and witchcraft, and narrow-minded, uncritical, unpractical scholars, laymen and clergy, jurists

³⁹³Janssen, *op. cit.*, VIII, 546.

³⁹⁴*Id.*, VIII, 529.

and theologians gave in to the popular superstition instead of making a stand against it.⁷³⁹⁵

The present-day teaching of the Church on this subject is less detailed. It is true the devil has certain powers over natural phenomena, but it is not necessary to attribute all the evil effects to direct satanic power. The Church does not make many positive pronouncements on this subject, and the majority of theologians confine themselves to probable opinions. "No Christian can assert the impossibility of diabolic influences upon mankind; nay, that they are possible is shown by Scripture and tradition; therefore the error of former generations (in regard to witchcraft) was not one of principle; it existed only in the manner of treating particular manifestations."⁷³⁹⁶ The possibility of such leagues with the devil, not, however, the existence of any particular compact, is a matter of belief for the Catholic.³⁹⁷ Yet the attitude of the Catholic mind towards the whole question has considerably changed, as we know now how much is purely natural which even the most enlightened men of their age formerly accounted supernatural. Many particulars of witchcraft, as the belief in the Sabbats, the belief in incubus and succubus, which played a most important part in the witch-trials, are now rejected either expressly or indirectly by the best Catholic theologians. The Catholic Church admits in principle the possibility of interference in the course of nature by spirits other than God, whether good or evil, but never without God's permission. As to the frequency of such interference, especially by malignant agencies at the request of man, she observes the utmost reserve. Father Pesch, S. J., says: "A priori we ought to be very slow in admitting in a given case that diabolical influence exists unless it is proved by irrefutable arguments. In matters of this

³⁹⁵Duhr, *op. cit.*, 7.

³⁹⁶Hergenröther, *Church and State*. London, 1876. II, 344.

³⁹⁷Lehmkuhl, *Theologia Moralis*, I, 278. Freiburg, 1910.

kind, the greatest incredulity is preferable to credulity, when there is question of men who make a business of such things. On the other hand, not all the narrations about compacts with demons are simply to be rejected as fables. If the fact is proved with historical certainty, and if this fact cannot be accounted for by any physical forces nor by human artifices, then we must reasonably find higher agents in it. It will appear from circumstances whether God, good angels or evil spirits are these higher agents. But in passing such judgments, the greatest caution is required, because in things so remote from the senses mistakes are very easily made.³⁹⁸

Catholic theology condemns magic and any attempt at it, as a grievous sin against the virtue of religion, because all magical performances, if undertaken seriously, are based on the expectation of interference by demons or lost souls.³⁹⁹ Even if undertaken out of curiosity, the performance of a magical ceremony is sinful, as it either proves a lack of faith or is a vain superstition.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸Pesch, *Praelectiones Dogmaticae*. Freiburg, 1898. III, 445.

³⁹⁹Perrone, *De Virtute Religionis*. Turin, 1867, 104.

⁴⁰⁰*Op cit.*, 105; Suarez, XIII, lib. II, cap. 14. Lehmkuhl, I, 277.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It seems at first sight from the mass of evidence offered that the position of the Church on the question of witchcraft was not a very definite one, but a summary of the principal facts will serve to make clear the following points:

① 1. The Church did not always consider and consequently did not always treat witchcraft and those who practised it in the same manner, or rather, as the evil developed, she met it by different means. Here we have to distinguish carefully between the idea of the possibility of the belief and the actual practice of it. In the earlier centuries (I-VIII) she treated the whole thing as a delusion, seemed to take for granted that no such practices really existed and contented herself with punishing merely those who believed in the reality of them. Her position at this time was by no means a denial of the objective reality of the malefic practices or of the effects alleged to have been produced by them. It seemed as though, knowing the possibilities of evil likely to menace a world newly turned from paganism and devil-worship, if she emphasized the reality of witchcraft and sorcery, she deemed it best to turn men's minds from the subject by treating it as a superstition, a belief unworthy of minds but recently opened to the truth. She by no means denied the possibility of *e. g.* commerce with the evil one, on the contrary, she, by expressly forbidding such commerce, granted not only its possibility but also its evident probability. What she did was what any wise mother does in the face of an attractive because unknown evil—she told her children that the evil was not at all what they thought it and was altogether unworthy of even serious examination. In other words she tried to shut their eyes to it.

2. When this wise provision became insufficient and the practice grew alarmingly frequent and fertile in destructive consequences to souls, in spite of her early precautions and attempts to remove the idea of the thing from men's minds, the Church changed her attitude towards the matter and her manner of dealing with the offender. Her children had grown, they could not be frightened by the earlier strictures; they needed sterner measures and the sterner measures were taken. Their eyes could no longer be turned away by warning; the allurements of the mysterious was too strong for them to resist. The influx into the true fold of half-converted barbarians who had worshiped the forces of nature, the increased intercourse with the Turks and Moors, whose beliefs were half superstition, the Eastern Schism which weakened the spirit of childlike trust in the pronouncements of their religious teachers, the sad frequency of all sorts of material disasters, wars, famines, plagues, tempests, fires, with their consequences, among which must be reckoned that feeling of human impotency before the forces of nature, and the innate tendency to control them or placate them in some way when it seems that God has forgotten His creatures and does not hear them when they pray—all these things seemed as it were to drive people to the practices of sorcery and witchcraft. Once the spark had caught in a single fanatic brain in any given village or town, the fatal faculty of imitation and that peculiar effect of mob psychology which makes a number of people acting together so different from any of the individual characters thereof, were factors which favored the development of just such a hysterical practice as witchcraft became about the fourteenth century. Forced by the situation to change her policy, the Church began to fulminate more rigorously against not only the believers in, but the workers of, witchcraft and sorcery. Not stopping to decide whether the Sabbats were real or the fantasies of half-crazed brains, she punished with im-

partial severity all who asserted that they had been so engaged, both witches and those who had recourse to them.

3. As the discipline of States was often seriously deranged by these disturbances, the secular arm was obliged to take cognizance of them. If the offenders had been content with a simple denial or admission of guilt, this matter would have been comparatively simple, but unfortunately the circumstantial accounts of midnight orgies and detailed descriptions of the personal appearance of Satan and his ministers, of the evils worked by his aid, so inflamed the popular imagination that the evil instead of being restrained by forceful measures only grew in magnitude and intensity. The State, thereupon, had recourse to its severest weapons—torture for eliciting the truth and death by fire for repressing the offense. The process has already been outlined,⁴⁰¹ the Church judged and the State punished. After the establishment of the Inquisition, the question by torture was introduced into this tribunal as a sort of necessary proceeding in arriving at the truth. Hence the criticism of the Church as a savage torturer of innocent but deluded victims. If the Inquisition used torture it was only following a custom revived along with other practices of the ancient Roman law. This point has been too well elucidated by Catholic historians to need further comment here.⁴⁰²

4. Heresy, when it first made its appearance in the Church, was frequently complicated and confused with witchcraft, especially was this true of the Cathari, Vaudois and Luciferians. As heresy was a crime against the State as well as against the Church, being a revolt against the established order of things, it was treated with the utmost severity by the tribunals *utriusque juris*. A heretic was often accused as a witch and a witch as a heretic, although perhaps guilty on only one charge. It is not a mat-

⁴⁰¹Chap. VIII.

⁴⁰²Vacandard.

ter of wonder then that the popular, not too well-instructed mind should fail to distinguish between the two and increase its hatred for both. This hatred led to the whole sale witch-burnings of which the Church is sometimes accused.

5. Finally it should be observed that at no period of her history has the Church pronounced a definite *ex cathedra* decision regarding the reality or unreality of witchcraft or the possibility of effects alleged to have been produced thereby. Theologians and canonists voiced their opinions on the subject, popes expressed their views, councils adopted measures to prevent the ruin of souls through practices evidently evil whether based on real phenomena or on the fantastic delusions of unrestrained imaginations. Many writers, as we have seen, took for granted the objective reality of witchcraft and the possibility of producing effects transcending nature, they did not even attempt to prove what seemed to them so obvious. In an age when faith in the supernatural was one of the strongest experiences of human life, belief in the possibility of intercourse with evil spirits was not likely to be called in question.

Today the question obtrudes itself insistently—did all or any of it happen, or was it all a delusion? Did the men and women who claimed to have assisted at meetings of demons really assist at any such gatherings or did they only think they did? Was there any such thing as a personal pact with Satan by means of which storms could be raised, crops blighted, cattle injured, enemies or rivals mysteriously killed or mutilated or afflicted with disease, human emotions excited or allayed or changed? Some of these phenomena are evidently to be explained now, as due to natural causes imperfectly understood in an age when medical science and physical laws were so little known. Some of them the Church has admitted, as, *e.g.*, the possibility of a pact with Satan and the interference with natural phenomena by agencies other than God, but

whether these agencies are good or evil, she does not say. Still others might be explained in view of present day investigations into hypnotism, suggestion and the psychic phenomena claimed to be produced by spiritistic media. This is, undoubtedly, a possible explanation of the extraordinary spread of witchcraft, and might easily account for some of the picturesque details supplied at witch trials.

Finally, the teaching of the Church, on the moral aspect of the matter, is briefly this: all magic and magic practices are sinful even when indulged in merely from motives of curiosity and hence are to be abstained from by all who profess to belong to her fold. The most definite opinions of accredited theologians have been those of the nineteenth century, who although not specifying particular practices unhesitatingly condemn them all. On the purely historical side of the question, it is not possible to deny the existence and power of evil spirits and still follow the teachings of the Church, even though she has given no precise definition of the extent of this power. Her policy, moreover, is based on this teaching, but frequently modified by popular beliefs and the exigencies of particular periods. As most of the cases of witchcraft had to be dealt with by officials of inferior rank, the avoidance of all error was not to be expected. Catholics generally and churchmen in particular have usually held the views of the age in which they lived.

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VITA

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